USĀBHILĀSA

by Sisushankar

Edited by SITAKANT MAHAPATRA







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USĀBHILĀSA is a major text in Oriya *riti kavya* tradition. Upendra Bhanja (1670-1740) is considered the foremost voice in this tradition. With the discovery of *Usābhilāsa* pothi its author Sisushankar who lived between 1560 and the end of 16th century, is being recognised as a pioneer in this tradition. He influenced not only Upendra Bhanja but also several poets of later period. This illustrated *pothi* is remarkable both as a *Kavya* and as a work of art.

SITAKANT MAHAPATRA

Sitakant Mahapatra (born 1937) is a major voice in Indian poetry. Anthologies of his poems have been published in all Indian languages and seven European languages besides English. A recipient of several honours including Bharatiya Jnanpith Award (1993), Sahitya Akademi Award (1974), the Orissa Sahitya Akademi Award, the Kumaran Asan Poetry Award, the Sarala Award and the Soviet Land Nehru Award. A Doctorate in Social Anthropology, he has been a Homi Bhabha Fellow (1975-77), a Senior Fellow at Cambridge University (1968-69) and a Ford Foundation Fellow at Harvard University (1987-88). He has translated into English and edited nine anthologies of the oral poetry of Indian tribes. He is President of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the World Decade for Cultural Development and Chairman of the Cultural Sub-Commission of the Indian National Commission for UNESCO. Earlier he has edited the Palmleaf manuscript *Amarusatakam* for Orissa Lalit Kala Akademi. He now lives with his family at Delhi.

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LALIT KALA AKADEMI, NEW DELHI

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1995

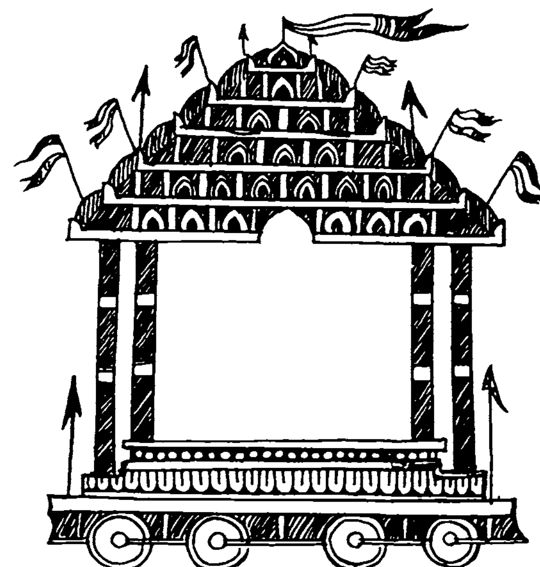
Photographs
Wettstein and Kauf.
Museum Rietberg Zurich, Switzerland

Illustration–Dinanath Pathy

Published by
Dr Dinanath Pathy
Secretary
Lalit Kala Akademi,
Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi

Printed at
Nutech Photolithographers
New Delhi

Price Rs 200/-



The Lalit Kala Akademi has been documenting and publishing various art forms to bring into focus the rich art heritage of this country. It has published several monographs and portfolios on Mughal, Rajasthan and Pahari paintings. With this monograph the Akademi for the first time brings to light a rare and vibrant painting tradition of Orissa of the medieval period. It is really astonishing that the tradition of scribing on palmleaf and illustrating the literary creations has flourished for centuries in Orissa and survives even to the present day.

The humid climatic conditions, fire and flood coupled with the occasional religious belief to consign the palmleaf manuscripts to water have reduced the number of surviving palmleaf manuscripts considerably. There is urgent need, therefore, to document them for posterity.

USĀBHILĀSA is the first Pothi monograph which the Akademi is publishing. It has been ably edited by Dr. Sitakant Mahapatra. Himself an eminent poet and distinguished scholar, he has done justice to the challenging task of translating and editing this very difficult medieval literary text. We record our appreciation for this commendable work and express our thankfulness to the authorities of the Orissa State Museum and the Department of Culture, Government of Orissa for their help and cooperation in this project.

Dinanath Pathy



Introduction



Orissa had a thousand-year-old temple-building tradition that culminated in the magnificent Sun-temple at Konark where the Oriya builders and sculptors "built like giants and finished as jewellers" On faceless, cold stubborn stones the anonymous artists carved out myriad delicate images and patterns pulsating with life From the stone to the seasoned palmleaf, from the chisel to the *lekhana* or iron stylus, it seems to have been only another step, a different but parallel endeavour One hallmark of Orissan culture has been to treat all art-creations—literary, performing and visual—as integral to each other Forms and figures that were carved on stone, were also etched on palmleaf, they were described in words and the words were set to music which accompanied the dance-forms One finds in Orissa's traditional culture this remarkable continuity and integration of the literary, visual and performing art-forms

Bulk of ancient and medieval Oriya literature was written on palmleaf manuscripts or *Pothis* Besides the Oriya *Mahabharata*, *Bhagabata*, and *Ramayana* hundreds of other literary works were also composed/copied on seasoned palmleaves with the help of iron stylus In the light of earthern lamps, in the semi-darkness of the rural night, the writer or scribe would go on etching words on the palmleaf No doubt words are not stones They are not nameless or faceless When the artist in words takes them up they have already acquired myriad associations, names and faces, distinct identities And yet the author would go on building structures of emotion in their various combinations and collages And when completed, the folios of the manuscript, would be tied up, generally with two flat pieces of smooth wooden planks, plain or coloured, placed at the two ends of the bundle to give it stability and strength Each folio of the entire manuscript would be pierced in the middle with a string passing through, with which it would be tied up as a book The seasoning of the palmleaf was an art and science which had been taken to a



point of perfection. Its life depended on the degree of proper seasoning to withstand the vagaries of time. What care, what love went into the making of literature through this laborious process! At the end of the work the writer would recount how he had strained his eyes and hands, bent his neck forward for days on end and created the piece of *pothi*. For all his pains he would expect and beseech the reader to treat it as a son, *putrabat paripalayet*. In fact hundred of such *pothis* must have been lost over time, though even today the *Pothi* Division in Bhubaneswar State Museum has the largest number of *pothis* in India. Some have many folios broken up or rendered too brittle by the passage of time. Others are still in fairly good condition.

And even after all this superhuman labour and pain of creation the readership was bound to be small. Often the original work received patronage from a royal court or a local landlord. Later, by duplication and copying, it could go on to other readers. Often too the original could be lost leaving behind only a copied version. Not all those who copied were well-versed in literature. They were more of scribes or copyists who perhaps did it for a fee and/or for making a name. And hence there could be marginal variations between the original and the one or more copies which were made out often at various points of time. Some copies could even be not from the original but from yet another copy. When the text of a major work had more than one such *pothis*, with many variations, there was obvious need for bringing out, what is called a *shuddha samskarana* or the edited version. The task is no doubt difficult for it would depend on initially determining the approximate year or period of a writer and then, with a host of internal evidences such as prevailing style, language-use and the form as also the use and non-use of particular words, etc. and their variations, such an edition would be attempted. In this field of scholarship, of editing palmleaf texts and publishing them with critical introductions, the pride of place easily goes to late Professor Artaballava Mohanty and the *Prachi Granthamala* series he started in the nineteen twenties. One of the books, the twentieth in the above series, was *Usābhilāsa*, published by Prachi



Samiti in 1929. It had seventyfive pages of annotated text and fortyseven pages of a definite critical introduction. The book was priced half-a-rupee and had a two-thousand copies edition. In an acknowledgement page Sri Mohanty refered to three different *pothis* of the same title on which his edited text was based.

II

In Orissa Museum's *Pothi* Division there are six *pothis* of *Usābhilāsa* (also called as *Ushaharana*). They have been purchased from different persons at different points of time. It is a pity that a full record of the different hands through which each of these *pothis* passed before it was acquired by the Museum is not available. Of the six, the one presented here is most intact from the point of view of the complete text, the quality and non-brittleness of the folios, the readability of the text and the visibility of the illustrations.

Of the six, in three including the present one the illustrations are in black lines, in two, they are in colour and one *pothi*, which has only 18 folios, is without any illustration and space has been left perhaps to illustrate later which was never done. Of the two in colour one illustration seem to have been coloured at a later date and not all the folios are in good shape. Red, ochre, black, yellow and indigo are the colours used. The other one with colour illustrations is also not in good shape in respect of all the folios. It would be difficult to present them in complete form.

Of the three with black line illustration one is badly incomplete with only 9 folios and the other one has also some folios in not very good condition. All things considered including the reproduction possibilities it was considered appropriate to take up this particular manuscript which, scholars put sometime in the latter part of eighteenth century judging from the nature of the illustrations. Even this manuscript does not have the last seven and half lines of the twelfth Chapter or *Chhanda* (it is fathomless................ twelve *chhandas*) and for that missing portion I have used the lines from the other *pothis* where this portion is intact.

There are thirtyone folios in this *pothi* but folio one is repeated on two leaves and both folios have the same page numbering namely one. The actual folios therefore are only thirty. The size of the folios is 25.5 cm x 4.3 cm. The *pothi* was collected from Ganjam area and was acquired by the Museum sometime in 1950. The illustrations seem to be more in the style of the *Bidagdha Madhava Nataka* illustrations.

III

The ancient and medieval poets of Orissa generally introduced themselves in their works. Sisushankar Das of *Usābhilāsa*, however, does not do so. He begins the *kavya* with an eulogy and prayer to Krishna. Each *Chhanda* or chapter also ends with a brief invocation of the name and glory of Krishna. At the beginning of the sixth *Chhanda* he delineates in some detail the life and doings of Krishna. He was perhaps himself a Vaishnavite and in any case was well-conversant with the medieval Oriya literature on Krishna theme.

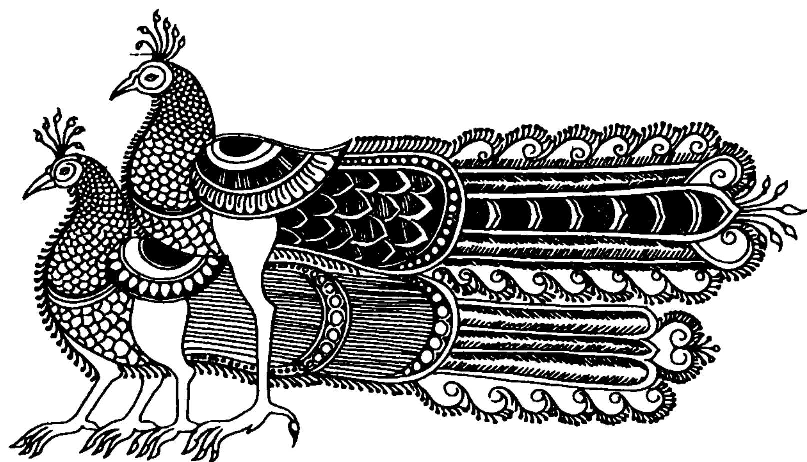
Upendra Bhanja (1670 - 1740 AD), referred to as Kavi Samrat, has been regarded as the uncrowned King of the tradition of *Riti Kavya* in Oriya. He belonged to the royal family of Ghumsar in modern Ganjam district. His grandfather Dhananjaya Bhanja was also a poet of some eminence. Since the publication of *Usābhilāsa*, which positively pre-dates his works, critics have started comparing Upendra Bhanja with its author and looking for its possible influence on the acknowledged master of *Riti Kavya*. In fact Professor Artaballava Mohanty felt that the publication of *Usābhilāsa* will be the first dent on Upendra's supreme and unequalled position. A comparison of the language in Upendra with that of Sisushankar points to the latter being sufficiently prior to Upendra. There are many archaic words, such as *Mayana* (for Madana, the god of love), *Sayala* (for Saila, i.e.mountain) etc., in *Usābhilāsa* which positively puts it in a period earlier to Upendra's refined, more developed and ornate language.



In this context Professor Mohanty refers to six medieval authors and their major works. They are Kartika Dasa, author of *Rukmini Bibha*; Pratap Ray, author of *Shasishena*; Padmnava Srichandana of *Shashirekha*; Kavi Lokanath of *Chitrakala*; Raghunath Harichandan of *Lilavati*; and Dhananjaya Bhanja of *Ratnamanjari*. In each of these *Kavyas* there is a reference to a particular *raga* or *disa* of a *chhanda* or even particular lines of *Usābhilāsa* which was to be followed in reciting specific portions of the work concerned. That makes it obvious that *Usābhilāsa* was not only prior to these *Kavyas* but also that it was a popular and well-known text when these six *Kavyas* came to be composed. It is true there is no irrefutable evidence to fix the period of these six works and their authors. But there is fairly reliable evidence to place atleast three of them, namely, Dhananjaya Bhanja's *Ratnamanjari*, and Raghunath Harichandan's *Lilavati* around 1655 AD and Kavi Lokanath's *Chitrakala* towards the latter part of seventeenth century. Professor Mohanty argues that in those days a text might have taken around a century to be read and enjoyed by large sections of readers and to influence subsequent poets of importance. On this ground he places *Usābhilāsa's* composition around 1555 AD. According to him it would be safe to assume that Sisushankar wrote his magnum opus *Usābhilāsa* in the early latter half of the sixteenth century. One could also argue that in medieval times the elite writers were often in royal courts and came to be known to each other fairly early. Even in that view of things Sisushankar's work should be placed somewhere between 1560 and the end of 16th century.

The story-line of *Usābhilāsa* is not very original. It is there in broad outlines in Oriya *Mahabharata* of Sarala Das (its Madhya Parva); in the Tenth volume of the Oriya *Bhagavata* of Jagannath Das; and also in *Harivamsa*. The first two briefly tell the story and the last one in some greater detail. No doubt there are variations in some details of the theme in these three works. Sisushankar takes over the celebrated puranic theme and gives it a new dimension through vivid characterisation and skilful language-use. The *kavya* is composed in twelve *chhandas* each with a





specific *raga* or *disa* appropriate to the theme narrated and its mood. His poetic talent is obvious in the way he develops the love relationship between the protagonists and the way he describes the major seasons like spring, summer, the rains and autumn through the dominant emotive moods and nature. Of particular significance is the imaginative and elegant way he links Usha's coming of age with the coming of the spring season with its myriad flowers and the gentle southern breeze carrying the aroma of flowers and bird songs. No doubt he conforms to the conventions of Oriya medieval *riti kavya* on love but he innovates in the use of language and imagery and in building up of passionate psychic states. He emphasises three principal *rasas*: *shringara*, which is indeed the dominant one; *karuna*, in the eleventh chhanda when Usha weeps bitterly to see her lover Aniruddha lying unconscious in the snakes' snare created by her father, the demon-king Banasura; and *veera*, in the twelfth *chhanda* when Krishna and the yadus are coming to fight Bana and rescue Aniruddha.

One may look at the story in outline through the twelve chapters. In the first chapter or *chhanda*, there is the usual salutation to gods and saints, particularly Gopinath or Purushottam, and the demon-king Banasura of Sonitapura is introduced. The next chapter goes in some detail into the beauty and attributes of his daughter Usha. The third chapter celebrates the advent of spring and the flowering or coming of age of Usha. The fourth delineates with exquisite detail aspects of nature, a spring dawn, the water-sports of Śiva and Parvati and Usha being afflicted by the arrows of Kamadeva, the god of love. The next chapter is devoted to Usha's pangs of affliction born out of love and her mentioning about it to Chitralekha. In the sixth chapter, Chitralekha identifies, through portrait-painting, that Usha's lover in dream is Aniruddha and through power of *mantras* she flies to Dwaravati and brings in Aniruddha. The chapter following is a delicate portrayal of the pair's first encounter, beautifully mingling shyness and raging passion and marriage according to gandharva rites. The next three chapters elaborate on their living together in



the bondage of love and desire, surreptitiously within the demon-king's palace which is kept as a closely-guarded secret by Chitralekha; the delineation of the myriad moods of the emotion of love; the coming of the rains followed by autumn and their dice game. In the eleventh chapter the demon-king gets the news and in furious rage he locks up Aniruddha in the snare of the snakes. The chapter also contains Usha's anguished cry at the fate of her lover-husband in memorable lines which far excel, in their lyrical intensity and heart touching pathos, the corresponding passages in Sarala *Mahabharat* or of the *nayika*, though in a different context, in the twelfth chapter of Upendra Bhanja's *Lavanyavati*. The chapter beautifully unfolds the unstated deep feelings of Usha for her lover which shyness kept so heavily locked in her heart. The last chapter describes the war between Krishna and the Yadus and Banasura. At one stage Śiva's direct intervention on the side of Bana appears imminent but that is effectively prevented. Finally Krishna returns to Dwaravati with Aniruddha and Usha to a grand welcome by the men and women of his kingdom.

The protagonists Usha and Aniruddha are presented as ideal medieval *nayaka* and *nayika*; the former is both *dhira* (gentle, patient) and *udatta* (impassioned) and the latter is *mugdhā* (the charmed one, the tranced). She is not only a paragon of beauty; the elegance and charm of her physical features are described through a number of conventional flower metaphors; she is also well-versed in the arts including the game of dice. Aniruddha is a great hero, the charming prince who is extremely handsome and the true inheritor of the clan of the Yadus. Their love and eventual marriage is in the pattern of Yayati marrying Sharmistha and Bhima marrying Hidimba both from the clan of demons.

There are noticeable similarities in the sequence that describes the anguished feelings of Usha at the end of her dream of the hero (who is later identified as Aniruddha) in the fifth *chhanda* and that of *Lavanyavati* the heroine of Upendra Bhanja's celebrated *Kavya* of the same name in its twelfth *chhanda*. That is yet another evidence of the likely influence of Sisushankar on Upendra Bhanja and the *riti kavya* tradition which is attributed to him.

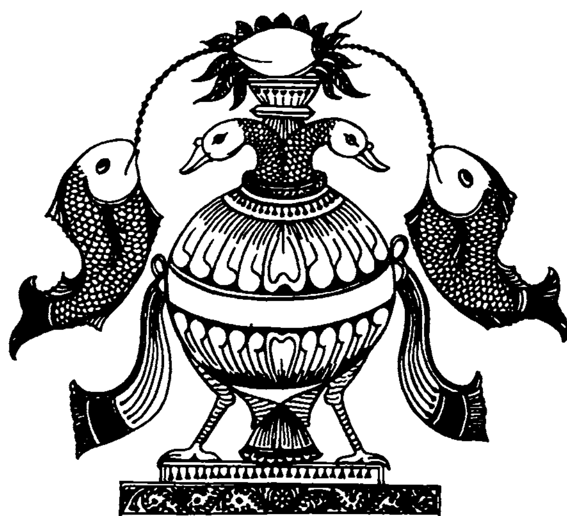
Each of the *chhanda* has a specific *raga* or *disa*. This was the usual practice in medieval *kavyas* where the lyrics were meant to be sung often to the accompaniment of musical instruments as much as to be read as text. The *ragas* are primarily Orissan. They are, in that order, from first to the twelfth *chhandas*: Malava, Mangala Dhanashree, Sangam Tiari Vani, Kalyan Ahari, Mangala Gujjari, Chokhi, Kedara, Bangalashree, Asadha Shukla, Baradi and Basanta Bhairava. Many of these *ragas* have been used in composition in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

IV

The illustrations in black line naturally depict a variety of themes and situations. We have *Mandapas* (archways) and *Kunjas* (bowers); we have the palace of Bana with its entrance showing a number of apartments: we have got a variety of trees and creepers and animals and birds; we have got human figures including the protagonists Usha and Aniruddha as also Chitralekha, Narada and others. There is also an attempt to delineate seasons and emotional moods by providing appropriate physical and natural contexts.

One important thing to note is the near-total absence of proportion in the illustrations. The space being limited perhaps realistic representation according to the relativities of proportions could have meant tiny creatures such as a squirrel or a cock being almost reduced to insignificance. It is not merely the birds and animals; some of the objects of daily use in the palace apartments such as *attardan*, *pan-bata* or the box for storing perfume and betel, etc., are drawn in sizes which are out of proportion to the surrounding objects. The illustrations of several sequences are almost in the nature of graphic diagrams and they help the projections of the various dimensions of apartments and other objects as they would normally present themselves to the viewer. Quite often the front and side elevations of a structure have been provided, perhaps with a view to obviate the absence of a depth of field. The illustrations seem to adopt a typology in respect of character portrayal. In large measure they conform to the





description of women in contemporaneous literature and of course they totally conform to the descriptions in the text. Mostly the faces are round with sharp angular nose and a small dotted chin. This is as should be expected for the illustrator as much as the text-writer had to struggle how to avoid tearing up the palmleaf even though well-seasoned. One escape-route must have been to avoid sharp turns and bends both in the letters and also the figures for such turns with a sharp iron stylus would always have the risk of mutilating the folio. Mostly the upper lip is shown as pretty thin while the lower one has a little fold. There is not much variation in the portrayal of individual features. Some kind of a convention seem to be the guiding principle in portraying male and female figures. Both for men and women the forehead is normally narrow. In case of women it slides towards the parting of hair.

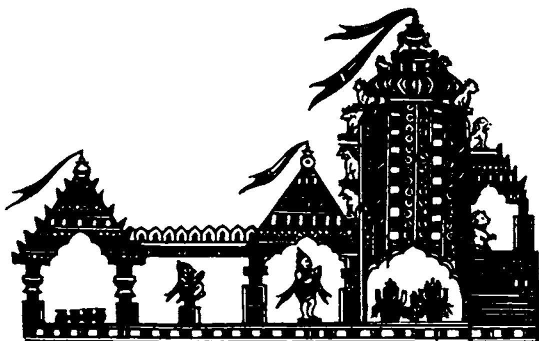
In one sequence Chitralekha paints the portraits of three princes conforming to the three different worlds so that Usha can identify the prince of her dream. The folio shows Chitralekha engaged in portrait painting with the help of a brush.

In the sequence describing the garden scene varieties of trees and creepers have been shown along with birds and animals. The squirrels and monkeys climb up the trees. In the sky above the sea the celestial sage Narada and Chitralekha are shown in flying positions at considerable altitudes. The perception and use of space is fairly developed. Even though views of *swarga* (the heavens), *martya* (the earth) and *patala* (the nether world) are supposed to be delineated, it is difficult to get any hint except through the characteristics of the figures who are inhabitants of these worlds. Likewise the palaces of Bana and Krishna and the apartment of Usha are illustrated schematically against a limited framework that works within a restricted landscape. The palace of Bana has a very impressive entrance. Inside the palace campus a few arches are placed here and there representing different apartments. But there is a praiseworthy aerial perspective which, as in a collage, reveals the chambers of the ground and upper floor with their windows and doors and their interiors.



The preponderance of archways and bowers lead one to believe that the *pothi* and its illustrations belong to the eighteenth century. For it was during this period that Orissa, and particularly southern Orissa, had an architectural grandeur in wooden archways, railings and carvings. Both Krishna and Aniruddha have south Orissan features with crowns *(mukuta)* and long plaits. The women have well-endowed coiffures or *khosa* with the hair gathered together also into plaits or *veni.* The menfolk are generally slim but the women have well-developed bodies and ample bosoms and heavy hips. The linear quality of the illustrations is very evident. That the scribe and/or illustrator was from a place other than Puri is borne out by the wrong relative placement of the Triad of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra. The battle scenes and the war processions are very vividly portrayed. They are well-imagined and go to extreme details. The illustrations also successfully depict the changing seasons with the varying moods of nature. The advent of the rains is shown through dancing peacocks, raindrops descending in almost continuous dotted lines from the dark clouds. The entire sequence looks like a veil and yet transparent as clear water. The crescent clouds touch the upper frame of the folio. Seeking protection from the rains the monkey climbs a tree for shelter under its foliage and squirrels run up and down. The gaiety and festive spirit of spring is highlighted by blooming lilies and lotuses in ponds, humming bees and hovering butterflies. The folio becomes almost a mosaic of flowers in blossom. As in other illustrated palmleaf manuscripts, here too the summer and winter seasons are not delineated. The perference for the season of rains and the spring is obvious.

The different times of the day have been depicted in the illustrations through a variety of measures: the placement of the sun in the sky, high or low; painting night as dark and sometimes with dotted stars; the moon for moonlit nights etc. In depicting processions the horizontal space has been divided into upper and lower bands or formations and the divisions of the army, the *chaturangasena,* have been clearly delineated. One can get the mood of the illustration of moonlit sky and sunsets. The opening

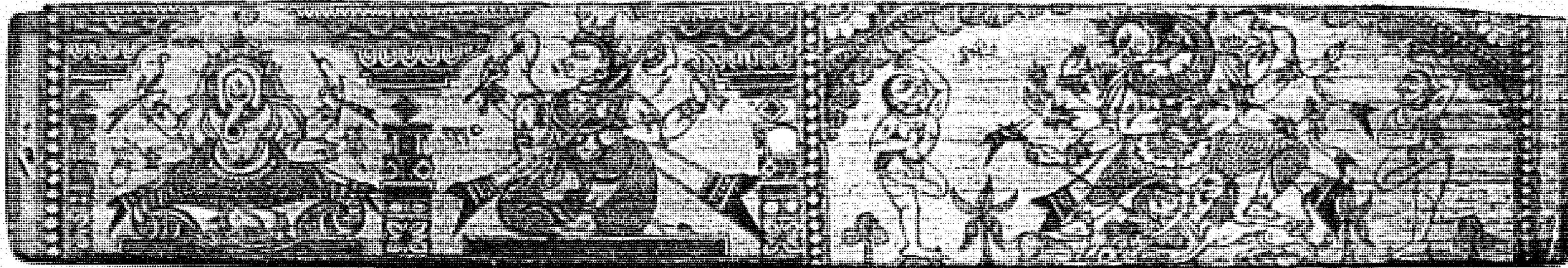


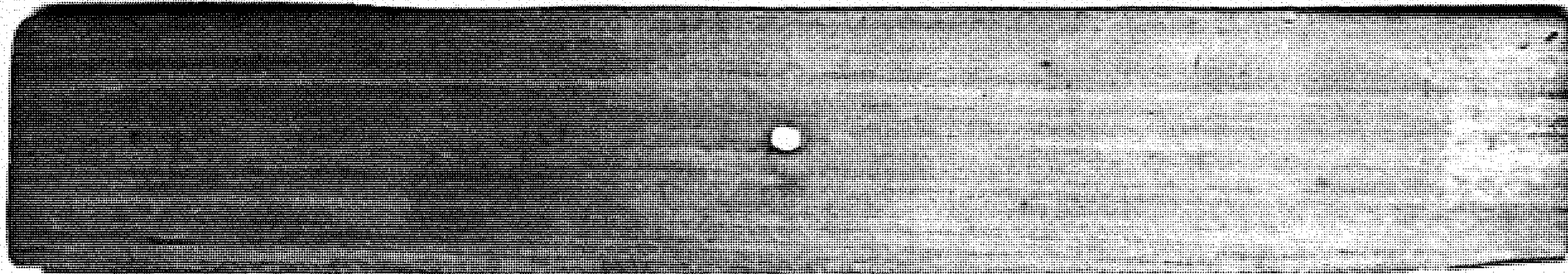
folio depicts Ganesha, Saraswati and Mahisamardini Durga which conforms to the tradition followed in many other manuscripts.

The sequences depicting Usha's anguish and *viraha*, the dalliance in the love-bower (*keli mandapa*) are very effectively presented. They compare very favourably with the *viraha* or separation sequences in *Gita Govinda* and *Bidagdha Madhava Nataka*. There are a few illustrations of the postures of love-making or *ratibandha*. Eros has a free play and both the shyness as also the frenzy have been successfully depicted. In one sequence the blue sky with moon and stars hang like a backdrop behind the pavilion. And when Usha has spent the night in desire and expectation the advent of morning is hinted with bright light. It has not been easy translating the text. I have been on it a little above four years. There are many traditional, quaint and colloquial words in this medieval text and one had to look for the nearest equivalent to convey the meaning. There were also a number of local names of trees, creepers, flowers, ornaments used by women, patterns of decoration of the body and specific rituals. Only a few of them have been broadly explained in the Notes. A few other words like *mantra, rasa, leela, rasika* etc., have been left unexplained as they have more or less come to be used in scholarly and other discourses. There are quite a few conventional imageries of medieval love-scenes in Oriya *riti kavya*. There are also a few socio-ritual occasions which have particular patterns of celebration. All this made the task of translation extremely difficult. It is hoped that in the final shape they convey the poetry of the original with as much fidelity to the text as possible for I have always believed that such fidelity should be the first concern of any sensitive and conscientious translator. If, along with the illustrations, they give a fair idea of this major medieval text of Oriya literature I will consider my labour amply rewarded.

Sitakant Mahapatra

New Delhi
Deepavali, 1992





CHHANDA 1

RAGA - *MALAVA*

SHREE GANESHAYA NAMAH

On the northern shore of the south sea
lies Jambudwipa, the tip of Bh(a)rath;
in that sacred land of Purushottama
the Lord of eternal bliss resides
inside the Blue Mountain. (1)

The devotees are all bees to that lotus;
to their *chakora* eyes He is the moon. (2)

The realm of salvation for *yogis*
and of all secret knowledge:
the blue-jewel Shyama; his many forms none
can comprehend. (3)

This enchanted world only his play;
the one, he becomes many
and again, at the end, becomes the One. (4)

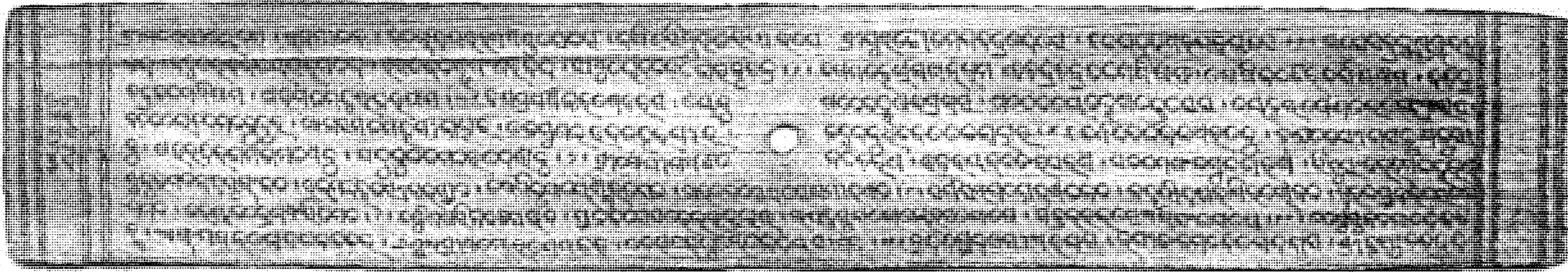
Distant to words, eyes and the mind
his grandeur is that of the sky;
whoever can comprehend him ?
who has the wisdom to explain ? (5)

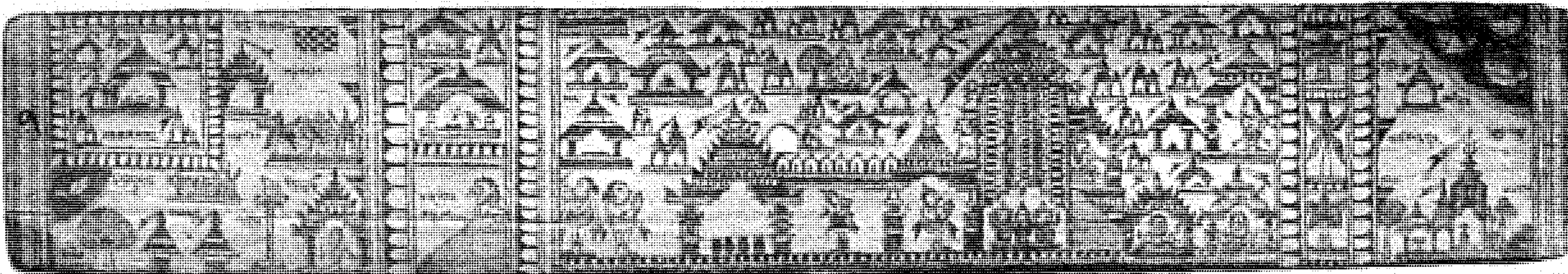
His body of pure blue clouds
he is the slayer of the demons, Kamsa,
Kesi and Truna, the *Kamadhenu* to the
desires of devotees the effulgent sun of the Yadus. (6)

Surrendering at His feet, the fear of *samsar*
no longer touches; the source of everything auspicious,
he has stolen Sisushankar's mind. (7)

Wisemen should judge me with compassion and
forgiveness; the wicked are snakes; even if you
feed them with milk they only spill venom and destroy. (8,9)

Burnt in fire and acid, gold acquires its brightness;
and so, with folded hands,
I beseech the wise, the ocean of mercy, to forgive my





conceit of seeking to weave the rhythms of
Usābhilāsa as the pure *rasa* of Srikrishna
for the pleasure of the rasikas. (10-12)

The powerful demon king Bana ruled
from the invincible fortress of Sonitapura,
inaccessible both to men and gods. (13)

Even Amaravati, the abode of gods, built by
Viswakarma stood no comparison to it.
With charming gardens, forested suburbs
the six seasons dwelt there happily (14)

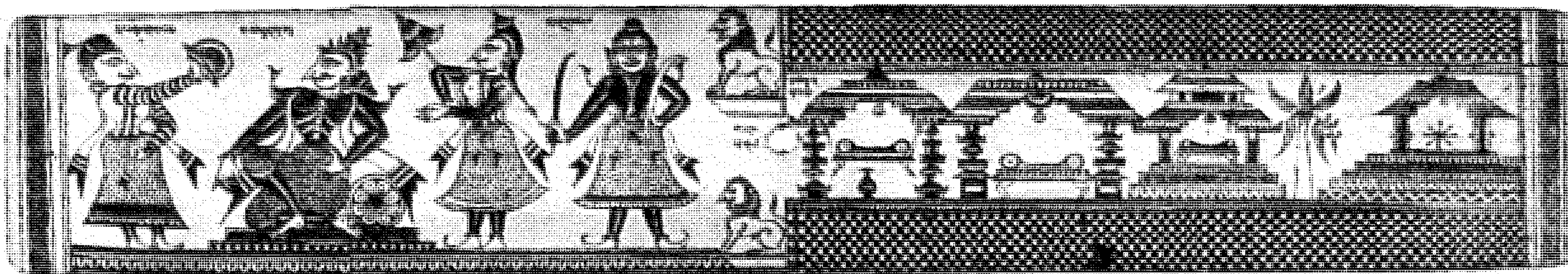
He conquered the three worlds; the kings
of earth and the immortal rulers of heavens
no one was equal to his valour (15)

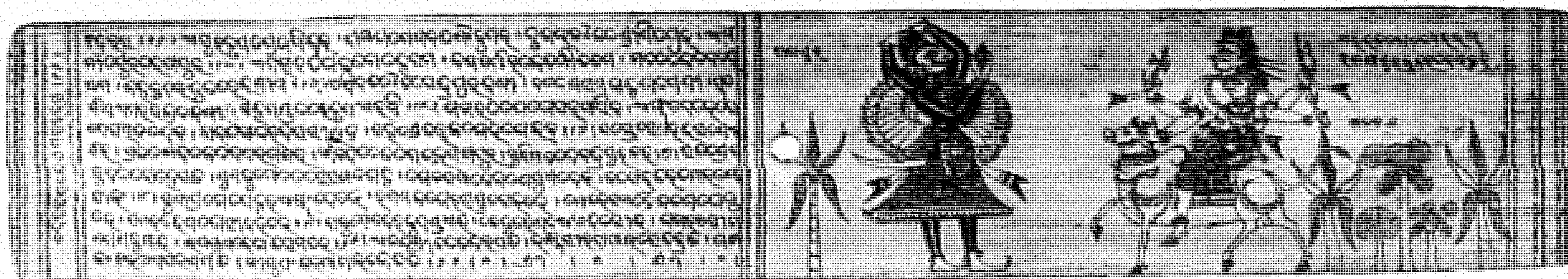
Pleased with his austere penance Śiva,
the god of gods, blessed him to have
thousand arms till the sun and moon lasted. (16)

Once when Śiva was out on a sojourn with Gouri
Bana prayed to him that with his
thousand arms there was none to challenge him
and he cannot stand this;
'Favour me that some one, powerful
like you, challenges me to a fight', he prayed. (17,18)

In anger Hara promised that he would
meet a hero equal to his prowess and he
won't lose until the flag-post of his chariot was broken. (19)
Bana returned to his capital and always
remembered this episode
He had a daughter named Usha and
no one was her equal in beauty and excellence, (20)

The Lord of the Blue Mountain by whose
side Lakshmi and Sharada are ever in attendance,
Sisushankar prays that his mind
be ever at His feet. (21)





CHHANDA 2

RAGA - *GUJJARI*

Listen now you wise *rasikas*,
who can describe in words Usha's beauty and excellence ? (1)

She was the spring breeze blowing
through sandalwood and mango groves
and for the heart of menfolk she was the moon. (2)

Goddess Lakshmi became apprehensive
looking at her graceful face
the spotless fullmoon of autumn. (3)

Serving Śiva with a smile
the moon possesses the quality of ecstasy.
Usha's face bears that grace and fragrance
and is a mirror to the god of love. (4,5)

Pearls flash in her graceful nose as indolently,
she looks at her own breasts, those golden
mountains bent on bringing back to life
the burnt-out god of love. (6,7)

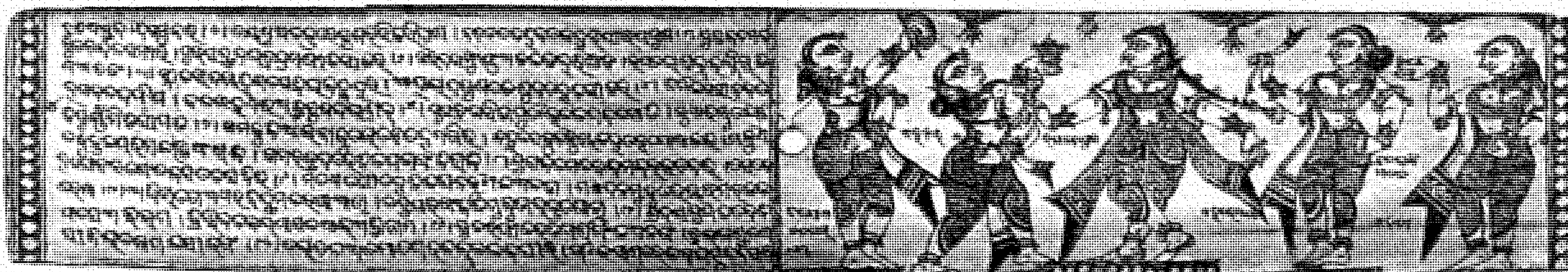
The bees hovering round her curled dark
coiffure are the blue flags in the love god's chariot. (8)

It is a temple to take in the mind of the
youth as prisoner; a dark night's moon the
jewel in the parting of her hair flashes
deep-blue as the mirror of the god of love. (9,10)

Along the curved line of the coral lips the
teeth glisten as pearls. (11)

The delicate ears are the traps set by the
love god to conquer the three worlds. (12)

The eyebrows are verily his bow and
the eyes are arrows sharpened with
collyrium once again to demolish the
meditation of Śiva . (13,14)





He put the seven primordial voices in her conch-throat
and the cuckoos learn their music from it. (15)

Even Śiva will lose his pride looking at
her cheeks; aware of his armoury he killed
the Love God even earlier. (16)

The soft rounded creeper of the two arms are
golden garlands of lotus. (17)

The palms are blue-gold spheres with the
exquisite fingers as tiny buds. (18)

The dense ample breasts on the two sides
of the chest competed in their growth. (19)

No space was left in between them perhaps
to deny a passage even to the mind; and
to see them was to lose one's own mind. (20,21)

As if the elephant of youth was mounted on the
lion-waist, holding aloft the two pitchers in a rage. (22)

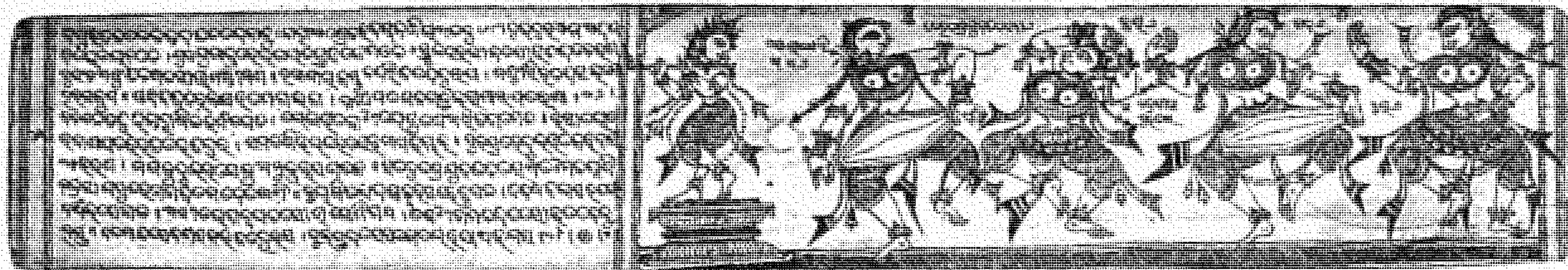
Or was it after the conquest of the three
worlds that in those golden pitchers are
stored Lord Śiva 's Treasures. (23)

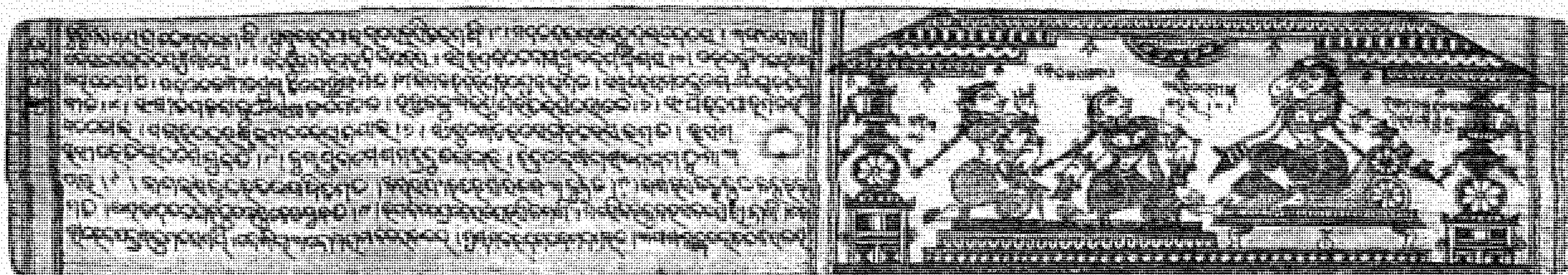
Beneath the elegant clothes are hidden
the *kasturi*-smeared rings of blue jewel, (24)

The deep navel on the slight belly is the
love god's snare and the line going down
from there only a rope to tie up the
mind of the youth. (25)

When Kamadeva was burnt to ashes the
melted nectar perhaps sprouted as the delicate
hair on the glowing skin meant only to
destroy one's conscience. (26, 27)

The heavy hips outdo the rounded trunks
of the banana tree and with its help
Kamadeva had conquered the universe, (28)





Once they chance to see it even Śiva
and Brahma cannot look away for many ages. (29)

The lotus stands no comparison to her feet
and on the well-crafted fingers the
nails shine as pearls. (30)

Polished, with the grace of refind gold
nowhere on the body one can see a joint or a vein. (31)

The *gandharvas*, the *kinnaras* the *yakshas*
and the most endowed *nayikas*, they
are not even fit to be her maidservants. (32)

Whatever in these poor words I have tried
to say she is ten million times more beautiful. (33)

Enamoured of her, Hara could live in
Bana's palace and Parvati could be afraid of a co-wife. (34)

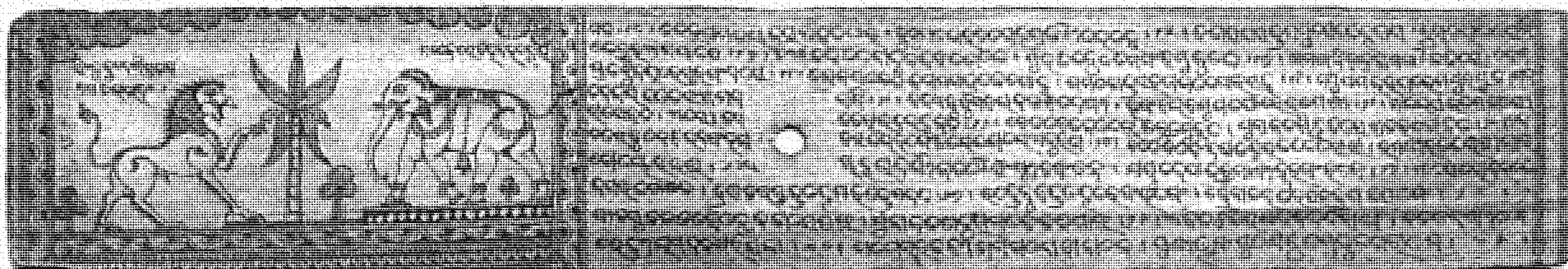
The garments rare in the city of gods are
plentiful to her. (35)

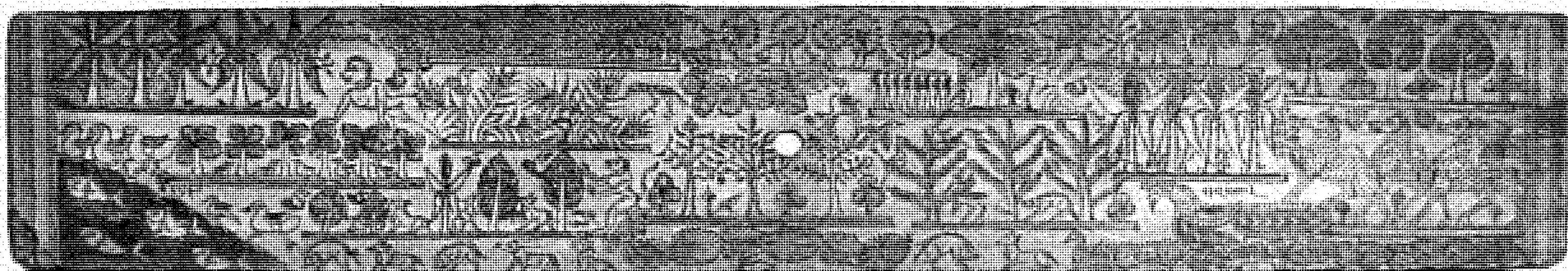
Thousands of maids serve her whims and in
the house of joy she regales in a wide variety of plays. (36)

Skilled in song, dance, poetry and music
she spends time pursuing the various arts. (37)

Lord Gopinath, whose dark cloud-grace
excels millions of Kamadevas and who
has an enchanting flute in his hands. (38)

Sisushankar worships that Lord and speaks
of this *rasa* as here ends the second
chhanda of *Usābhilāsa*. (39)





CHHANDA 3

RAGA - *MANGALA DHANASHREE*

It was the time of flowering
and Usha flowered into womanhood. (1)

The god of love was now installed in her heart
and her body became a forest in spring. (2)

Indolent pursuits now appealed to her mind,
as she took in the gentle fragrant breeze. (3)

Her liquid eyes moved in curves
like a shivering flower bothered by bees. (4)

Her mind-elephant was intoxicated with desire
as she walked lazily with indolent eyes. (5)

With friends as they discussed songs
she would feel the erotic nuances behind them. (6)

And even while the mind lingered
she would avoid the topic in mock embarassment. (7)

No longer for her the children's play;
it was now the time of youth and its ardent desires. (8)

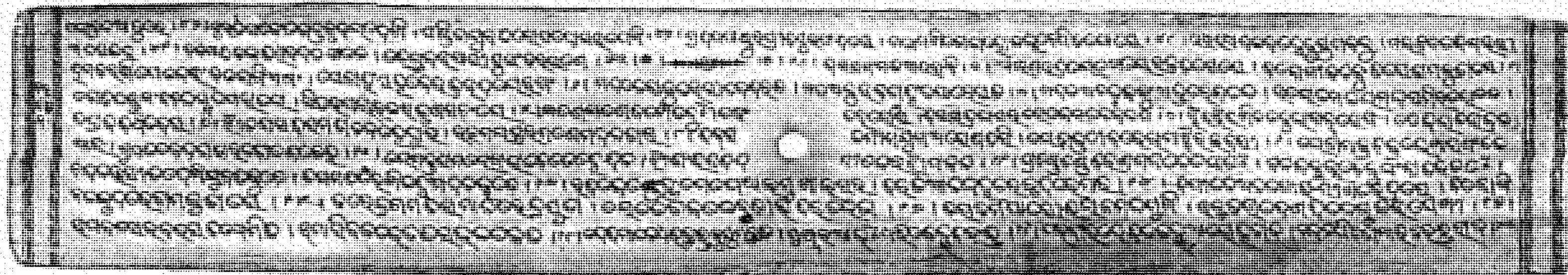
Chitralekha, the daughter of the minister Kumbhanda,
was her constant companion
and she knew the mysteries of all love-play. (9,10)

In fun and jokes she always kept Usha engaged
and once they entered the enchanted garden
looking like the chariot of the god of love. (11,12)

It was the time of spring's sweet intoxication
and her unquiet mind watched the flowers
distilling aroma in the gentle breeze
and the new leaves tremulous as tender looks. (13,14)

With the touch of the spring wind
the trees and creepers had blossomed in love. (15)





Like an impatient deer hit by a suggestion's arrow
her hands and thighs trembled in anguish (33)

Her mouth was dry and the cheeks tremulous
she spoke as a koel with a choked throat. (34)

Pretending tiredness in the walk
she sat down indolent
and Chitralekha took her in her lap. (35)

They fanned her with bunches of flowers as
holding her friend's hands she got up
still unable to stand the pangs of separation. (36,37)

Back in her chamber she asked her friend
to free the koels in the cages to the groves. (38)

The autumn was clad in blue dress
and the moonlight was cold as snow. (39)

"What an incongruity this, dear friend?" She said;
"What do I do when the love of yester-years
now works as poison?" (40)

Saying this she lay down on her bed
and sleepless the night passed. (41)

The *chakua* bird was now happy with the dawn
and the lotus opened slowly in water. (42)

The moon went behind the hill-top
and the *chakoi* was anguished to see the lilies folder. (43)

The love-lorn, out on escapades,
blamed the cock's crow
counting time at the finger tips. (44)

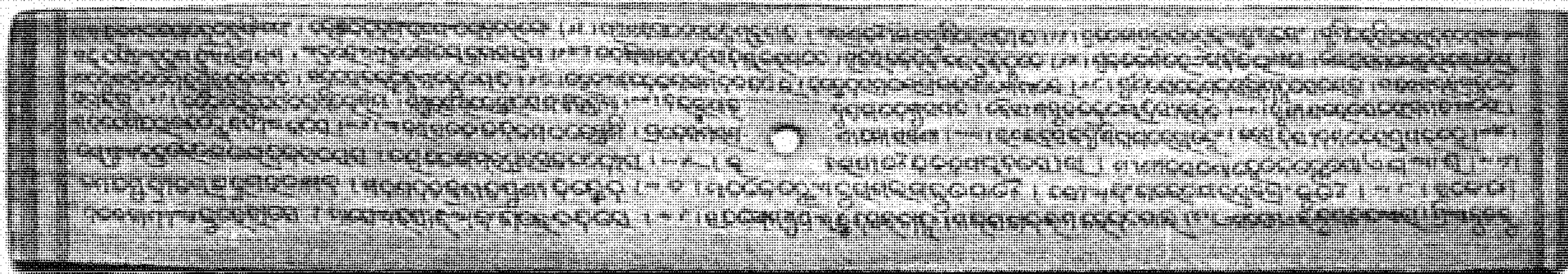
Sleepless in separation the loved ones
sat alone with canvas and ink. (45)

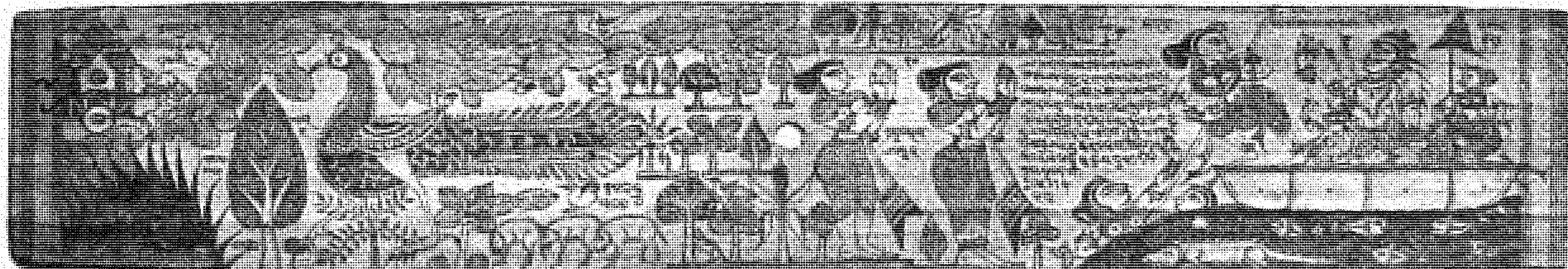
Awake the wearisome night when she saw
the tell-tale marks of love-play on her husband's body
the angry *nayika* fretted and fumed. (46,47)

The lamp burned low; the red glow came in the east
chatter of diverse birds drowned the koel's song (48)

A gentle breeze wafted from the forest of flowers
Usha got up from bed indolent in body. (49)

Meditating on the face of *Kalanidhi*, the *Banamali*
Sisushankar completes the narration
of this third *chhanda* of *Usābhilāsa*. (50)





CHHANDA 4

RAGA- *MANGALA GUJJARI (SANGAM TIARI VANI)*

At the end of the night the sun rose
like the flame of passion in separated lovers. (1)

Unable to stand even the cold rays of the moon
how do they face the blaze of the sun? (2)

Ecstatic in the dawn of love
Usha was unable to tolerate this new passion. (3)

Deep inside the fire of love burned
and it leapt high fed by the indolent spring wind. (4)

The koel song, the murmer of the bees
only added ghee to that fire
and all the efforts for cooling it down
only fanned its rage. (5)

Her body trembled, was goose-flesh all-over
she gave up food and sleep
had no care for dress
and pined away as her body grew thin. (6.7)

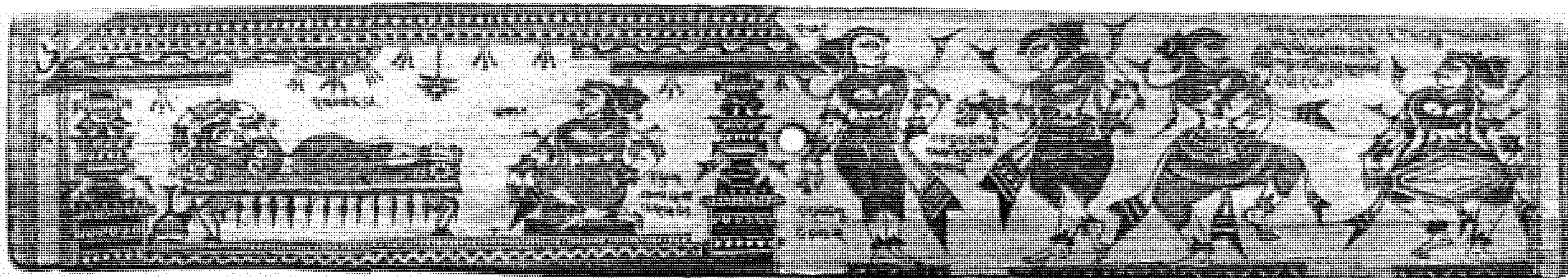
The gossamer-like clothes now weighed her down
and the bejwelled chamber was the prison house
of the god of love. (8)

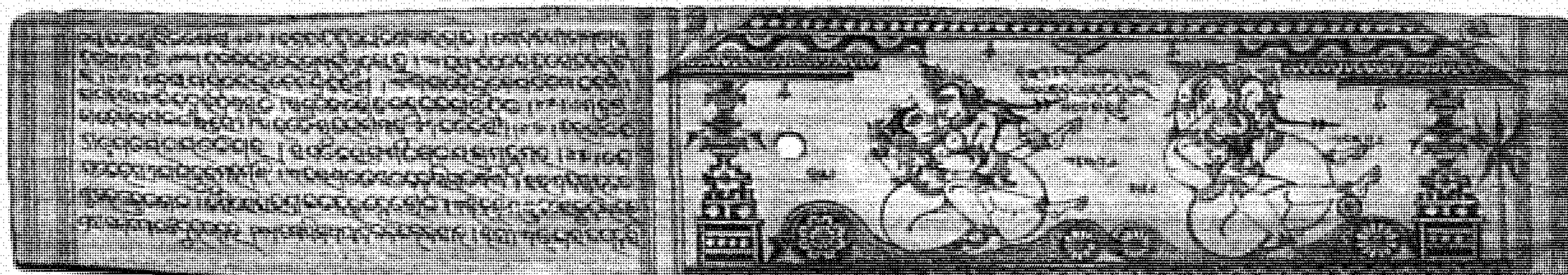
A day was an age and the nights
never seemed to end
sitting alone in quiet spots she was lost in thought. (9)

Only Chitralekha kept her company
and no one else knew her deep anguish. (10)

Days passed and now the crickets' harsh music.
mingled with the strong wind.
The sky burned with fierce rays and
the animals of the jungle
hid in bowers of cane and shrubs. (11,12)

Madan, the god of love, sought to hide





in the shade of the ample breasts
of women painted with sandal wood paste. (13)

Like the sun shooting arrows
from behind the clouds
the god of love stole the pleasure of
separated lovers. (14)

Forest fires were seen on hill tops
like the leaping flame of lust
in the hearts of lonely couples. (15)

The daughter of the king
had the slow movement of a stately elephant;
the anguished creeper of separation
now grew only with her tears. (16)

She forgot the daily rituals,
driven by anxiety she left her chamber
and sat near the tank in the forest
where Lord Śiva was in dalliance with his consort. (17,18)

The goddesses held aloft umbrellas and fans
of flowers for them; and some, riding the boats,
showered sandal paste. (19,20)

Some swam across collecting lotus
and threw them to the bank
with liquid movement of the eyes. (21)

Drunk with sweet wine
She cast her eyes on Sambhu. (22)

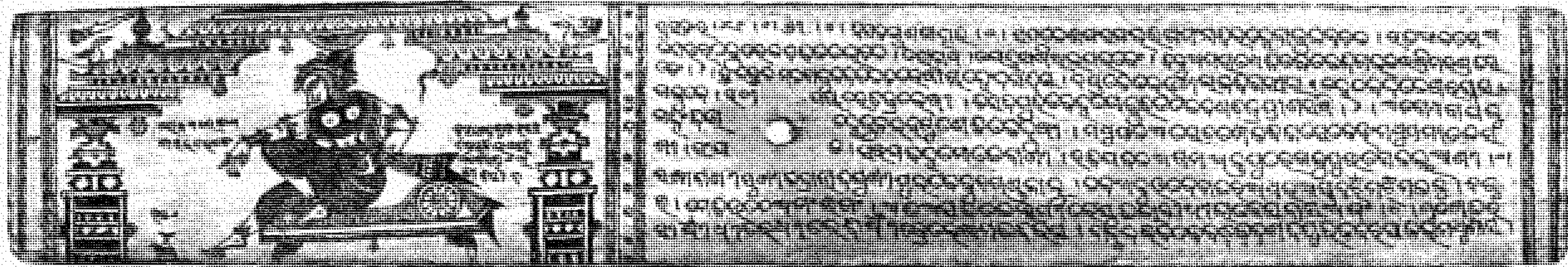
It was as if the god of love was himself incarnate
with those broken words, smiles and rolling eyes. (23)

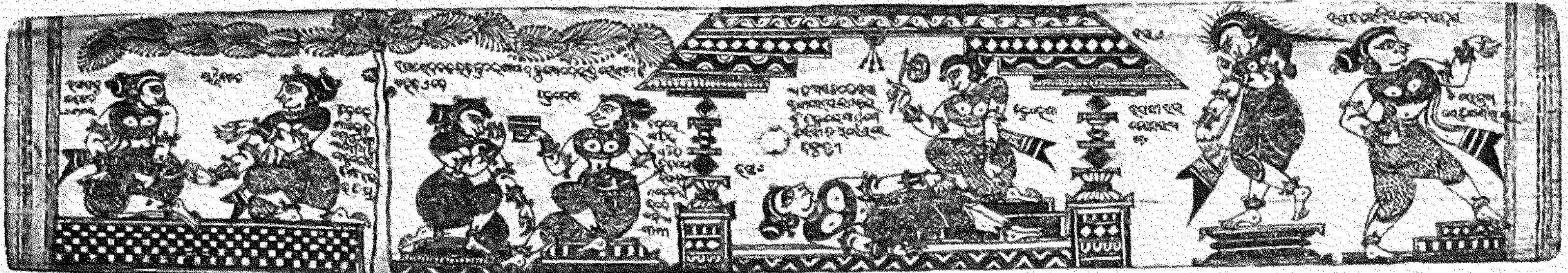
The water sprinkled only cooled the body
but deep inside desire's flame leapt higher. (24)

Startled, Usha thought to herself.
Cursed be youth without lover. (25)

God destined it for me that in youth
I had to suffer the pangs of separation. (26)

From the body is born the enemy:
the two breasts, home for the god of love. (27)





And that god is so inconsiderate
he hits you when you are without your lover. (28)

I am a woman without luçk
for who does not get the company
of his husband in youth ? (29)

Uma, the consort of Śiva, could know her mind
and blessed that
her dream would come true
on the thirteenth day of the
bright fortnight of *Baisakh*. (30,31)

Happy to hear that Usha returned with a swan's gait;
and in her chamber she shone
like the moon in the sky;
she kept counting the days when
the ordained hour would arrive. (32,33)

She would wake, sit up and look around
in joy, in pensiveness
as a day ended and the red glow
was in the sky, on the city, everywhere. (34,35)

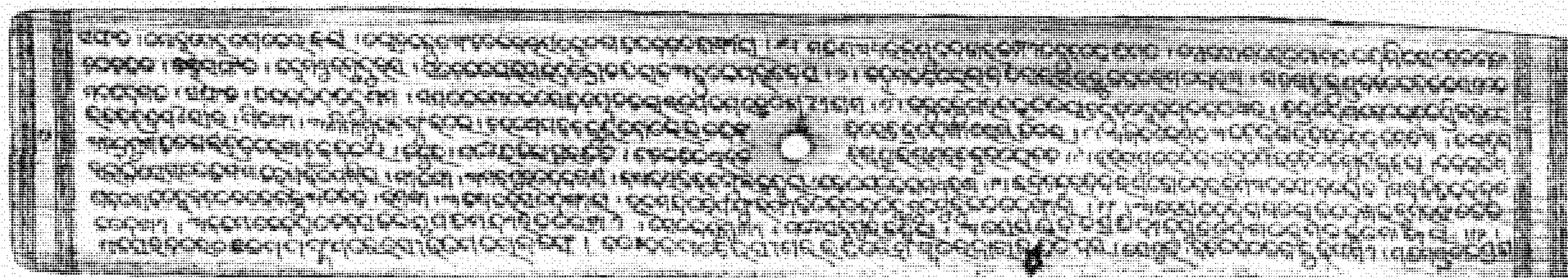
As coral loses its glow, placed by the side of pearl
Leaves of *patali* tree now lost their glow;
the lotus closed its petals,
the bee grieved
and the *chakora* was lovelorn. (36,37)

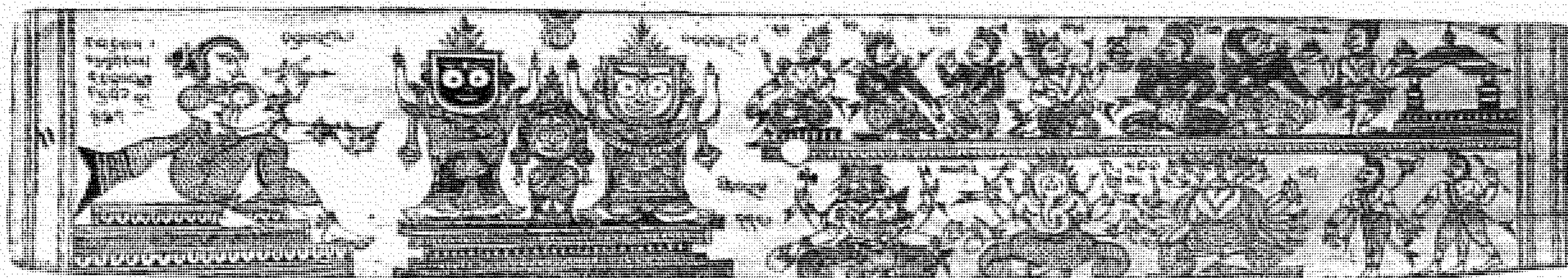
As feigned anger submerges affection
darkness now submerged all colours (38)

The lovelorn speaks in anguished symbols
and even when the beloved is near
she is not sighted in the darkness. (39)

The bee is just before her
but unable to see it *mallika* cries
deprived of nectar. (40)

At such times the moon looks red
like the beloved's breast painted in *kumkum*. (41)





The dense dark of the night is dispelled
by the moon's embrace
the *Tamala* forests are lost in the dark
and the moon hides in the ladies' chamber. (42-44)

The moon was tense with lust
and the koels were conceited;
Thus the first quarter of the night passed
when Usha fell asleep. (45,46)

And in her dream she indulged in love-play
with her lover Aniruddha. (47,48)

As she pressed him to her neck
considering it all real
the day dawned and she was left love-lorn. (49)

Remembering the tender lotus feet of Gopinath
the dispeller of the suffering of the anguished
Sisushankar narrates the *Usābhilāsa*. (50,51)

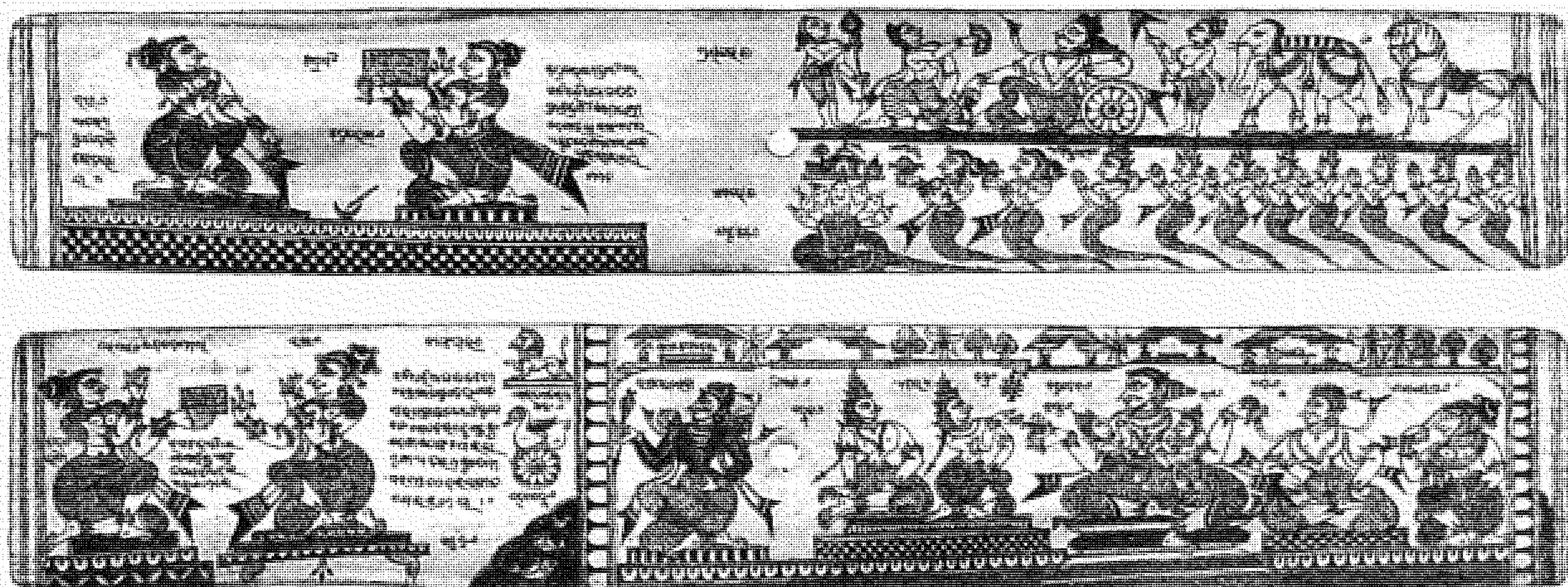
CHHANDA 5

RAGA - *KALYANA-AHARI*

Enjoying the lover in her dream, Usha left the bed
her body lazy, the liquid eyes rolling
as she looked for her absent lover
whom she blamed for indifference to her death. (1)

Her mind unsettled, the words disjointed
she breathed heavy, and deep
and asked Chitralekha
about him, as she looked in all directions. (2)

Chitralekha called her foolish,
Yet unwedded how on earth could she have a man
for whom she was pining
and who could anyway enter her chamber, where
even the sun and the wind had no access. (3)



Hearing her words Usha recalled her sleep,
her lips, breasts and thighs quivered
her body trembled as she fell on the ground
her clothes and coiffure all in disarray. (4)

Chitralekha sprinkled water on her face
and fanned slowly;
in anguish she blamed destiny
that had brought the rains in the season of spring
and the illusory mist that swallowed her;
now the koel music hurt as her eyes rained tears. (5)

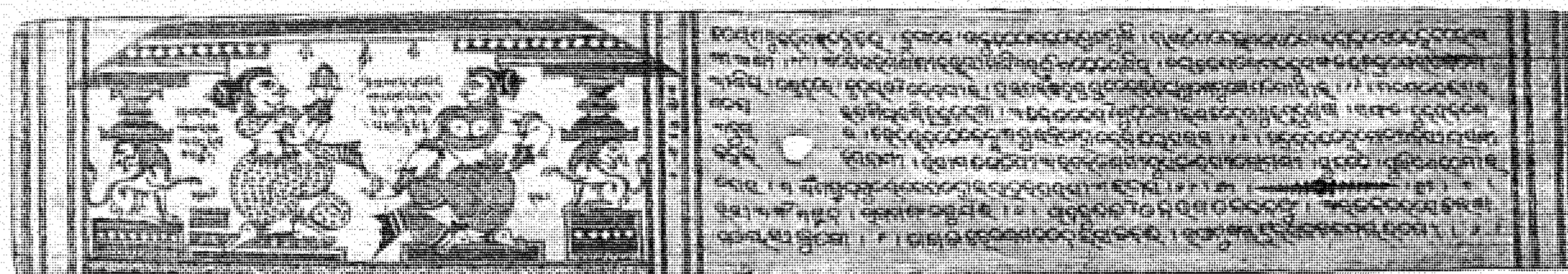
Your lotus-lips are pale, the breasts heave as a peacock's
my mind's river flows into the ocean of anguish,
dear friend, speak sweet and soft, my autumn moon. (6)

And when she spoke finally
it was in a dreamlike state, with anguished shyness
and she said: dear friend I saw him, my love
his body was a blue cloud
and millions of Love-God won't equal that grace
and he gave me hell in my dream. (7)

As she said this, collyrium-washed tears
flowed from her eyes and Chitralekha consoled her:
be calm and seek to identify him
from pictures that I would paint for you. (8)

She started drawing pictures
of all beings in the three world:
first, the gods of Amaravati
Indra, the moon, the sun, the god of water, the god of wealth
the fire-god, the god of death, the gods of Śiva 's world
the *Gandharvas* and *Kinnaras*
one by one she showed them to Usha
but the koel of the bejewelled cage only looked for
the mango-blossom that was not there. (9-11)





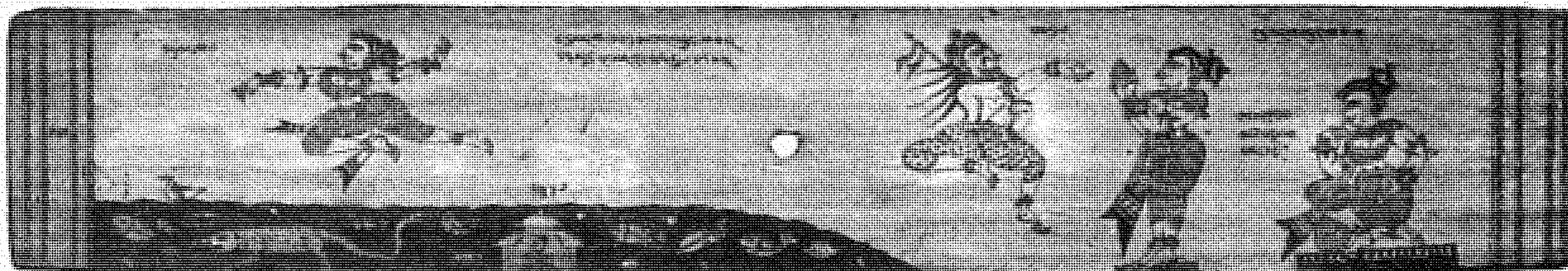
After the endless parade of the gods, the world of snakes
the earth and its humans, the demons
all the kings and princes......
Usha did not find her dream-man;
finally Chitralekha revealed to her
the heavenly kingdom that charmed her mind. (12)

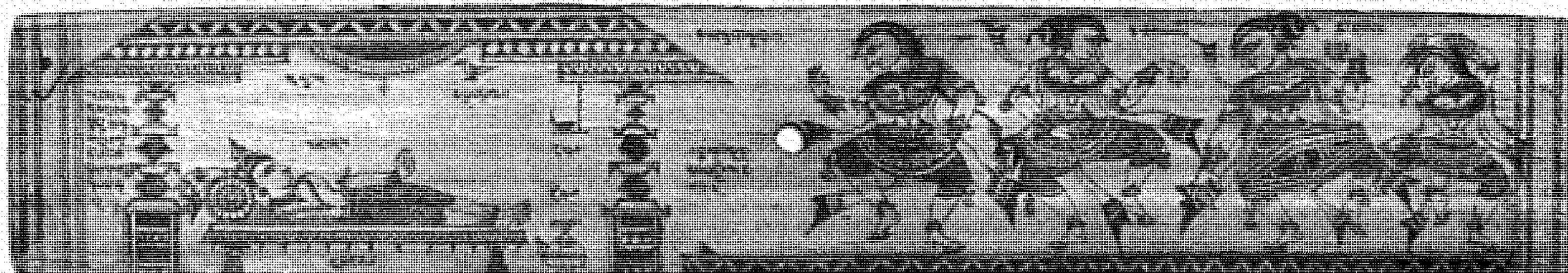
The kingdom of Dwaravati in the sea, full of golden lotuses
gems and jewels without comparison
wherein Ugrasen and the eighteen clans lived in glory
and sixteen thousand one hundred and eight chambers
where lived charming women;
Krishna and Balaram too were there
and finally Aniruddha seeing whom Usha was in ecstasy.
She tried to look away but could not
her heavy breasts heaved in delight
her face shone as the moon
and the bee was finally lost in the flower's nectar. (13-18)

And she tried to put his picture away
and then again drew it near
placed it on her heart and
pressed its hands on her breast
and joined her lips to its lips. (19)

Now Chitralekha knew her secret dreams
and placing back the portrait
she complimented Usha on choosing as her love
the rare person in the fourteen worlds. (20)

And Sisushankar, his mind at the feet
of the father of Usha would be consort
completes auspiciously the fifth *chhanda* of *Uṣābhilāsa*
and requests good readers
not to find fault with him. (21)





CHHANDA 6

RAGA-*MANGAL GUJJARI*

Friend to his devotees, ever near to love
an ocean of compassion for the anguished
with her mind at his feet
Chitralekha spoke to Usha. (1,2)

He is without a beginning
has no shape, no name
and has been born on this earth
to relieve her suffering. (3)

Born in the city of Mathura to Basudev
he fled away in fear of King Kamsa
and grew up in Gopa. (4)

He killed effortlessly many mighty demons
Putana, Baka, Argha, Dhenuka, Pralamba
Sankha, an endless number of them. (5,6)

He delivered the son of Kubera from a curse
and lifting up the mountain
demolished the pride of Indra. (7)

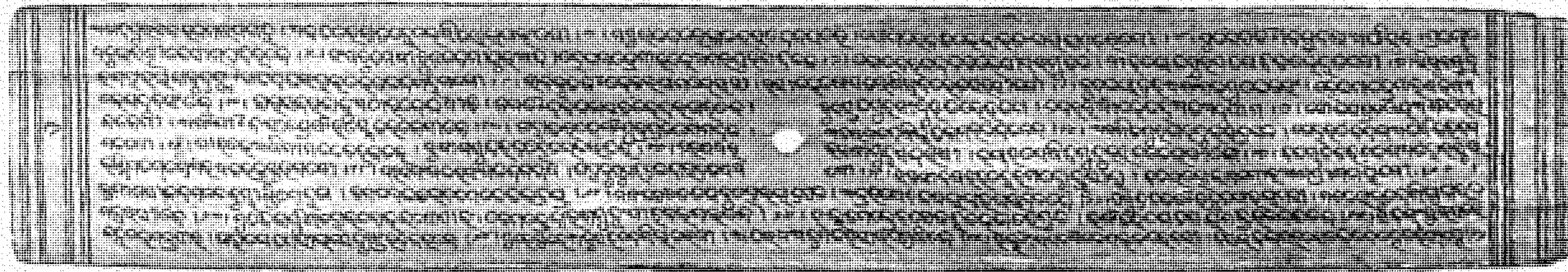
Brahma kidnapped the cattle of the cowherd boys
and admitted defeat;
he trampled the head of the the snake Kaliya
and restored the glory of Kalindi lake. (8)

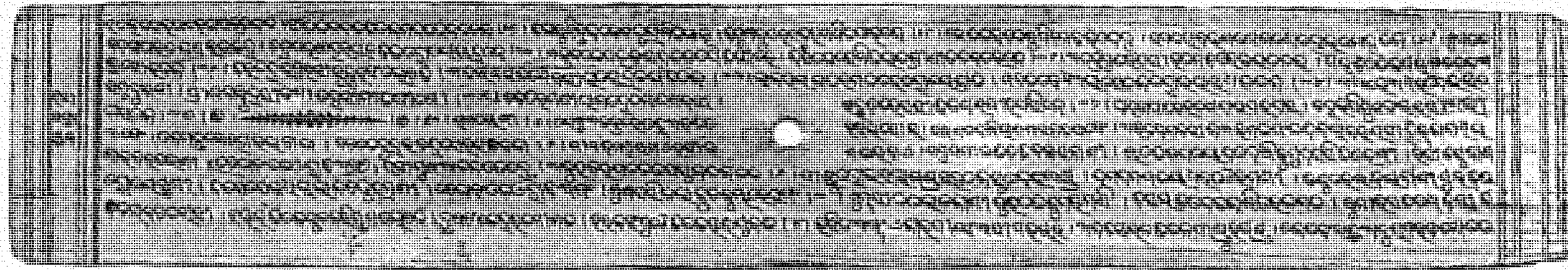
Appreciative of love, the compassionate one
he had dalliance with the women of Gopa. (9)

Destroyer of Kubalaya and the eight wrestlers
He protected the yadus and killed Kamsa. (10)

King Jarasandha was defeated eighteen times over
and the demons were destroyed by deceit. (11)

He built a charming city, Kusasthalipur, inside the sea
where reside the sixteen thousand and one hundred eight
queens of whom the principal one is the mother of Aniruddha
the incarnate god of love seen by you in the dream. (12-14)





That city is inaccesible
and it is difficult to have a view of it;
yet, seeing your anguish, I will have to go there. (15)

If I can I will certainly bring him along;
hearing this with tearful eyes Usha held Chitralekha's feet
and cursed her own evil destiny. (16,17)

She wished her god-speed;
let the consort of goddess Lakshmi bless your efforts
let Ganesha, Śiva and his consort be on your side
and you bring along the lord of my life. (18-20)

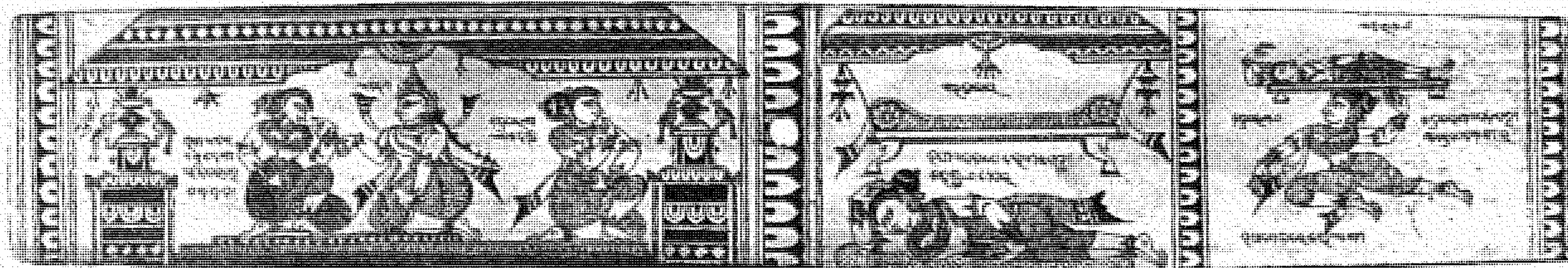
Kumbhanda's daughter
prayed in her mind to the lotus-eyed lord
and could see the auspicious signs
and flew towards Dwaraka in the sky. (21,22)

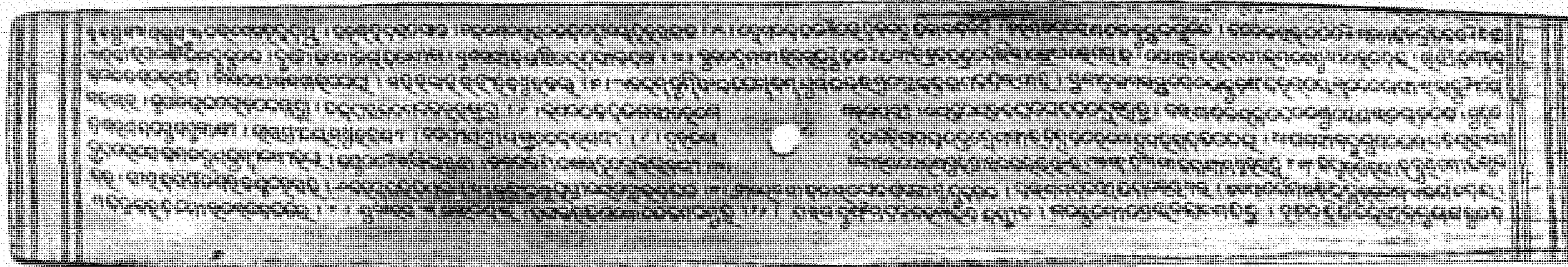
Approaching the sea she could not proceed further
and just then the sage Narada appeared before her. (23)

She entreated him to help reach Dwaraka
and Narada gave her the benefit of Ullooka *mantra;*
with that powerful *mantra* she entered
the city of Krishna and moved from chamber to chamber
until she sighted Aniruddha
equal in beauty to Usha
sitting disconsolate on his bed with all his friends
trying in vain to make him happy. (24-28)

They smeared him with sandal paste
they gyrated around, luxuriously dressed
a cold breeze blew and yet
he paid no attention to these
pining away for the dreamt woman;
he was startled at the vioce of the koel
and seemed to be lost in a dream. (29,30)

No one seemed to know his secret anguish
Chitralekha was surprised and happy to see that. (31,32)





With the power of the *mantra*
she carried him, seated on the bed,
and at the end of the day
arrived in Sonitapura. (33)

She entered Usha's chamber
to find her rolling on the bare floor. (34)

Love-lorn, doe-eyed Usha now sat up,
in love, in shyness and fear, in front of Aniruddha. (35)

But Aniruddha, hit by the arrows of love god
made bold to place his lips against hers
and gently entreated her to smile and to speak. (36,37)

Startled, she bent her head double
as if the moon went behind mountain Kanaya
afraid of the demon Rahu. (38)

The slave of the slave of the king of Dwaraka
Sisushankar narrates this *Usābhilāsa*. (39)

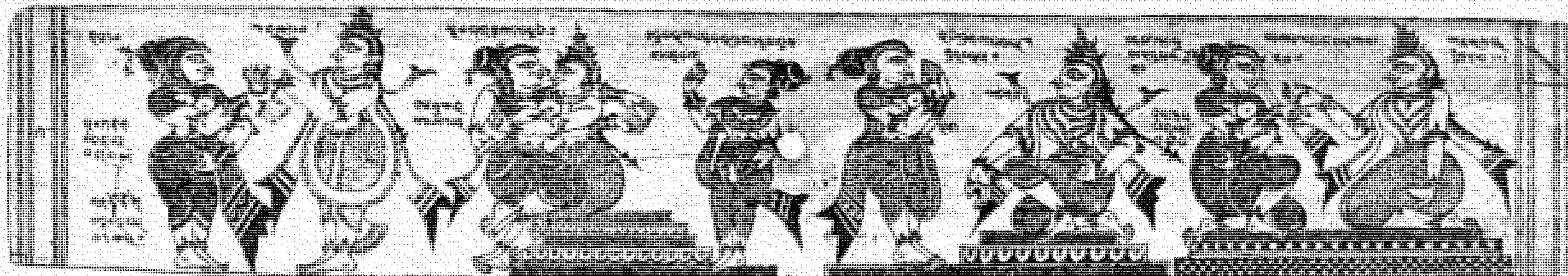
CHHANDA 7

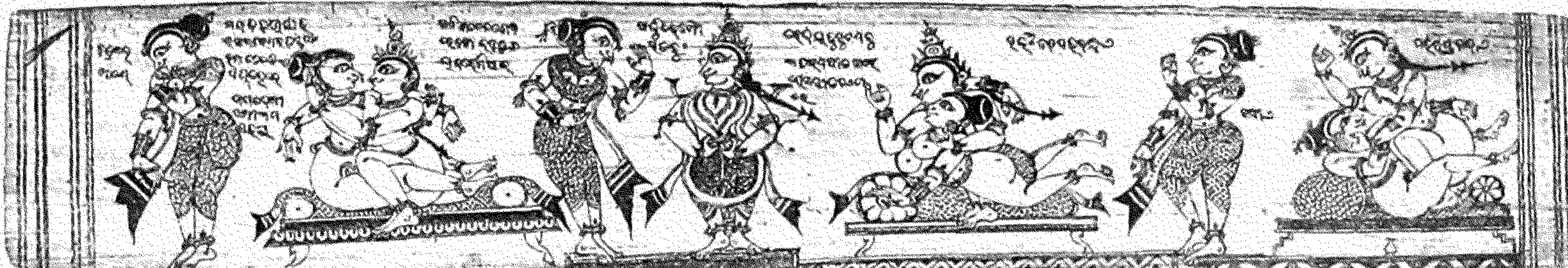
RAGA-*CHOKHI*

Usha, lying on the floor, saw the newcomer,
the man of her dream with friend Chitralekha
and was struck by a sudden sense
of fear and shyness which cannot be described. (1)

It was spring,
the time of gentle breeze
and varieties of flowers blossoming;
she felt a sense of ecstasy
like the bees noticing the flowers
the sparrow sighting the clouds or
the night flows when the moon is up. (2)

Her cheeks were red, her breasts heaved
words were choked at the throat
but she was overjoyed
and fully covering her body wth the saree
she put her face between her breasts. (3)





His own mind flowing with love
Aniruddha squatted in front of her and said
in utter humility:
O doe-eyed, are you afraid of any lion?
With your eyes you have stolen my heart
and have hidden it away in the box of your breast. (4)

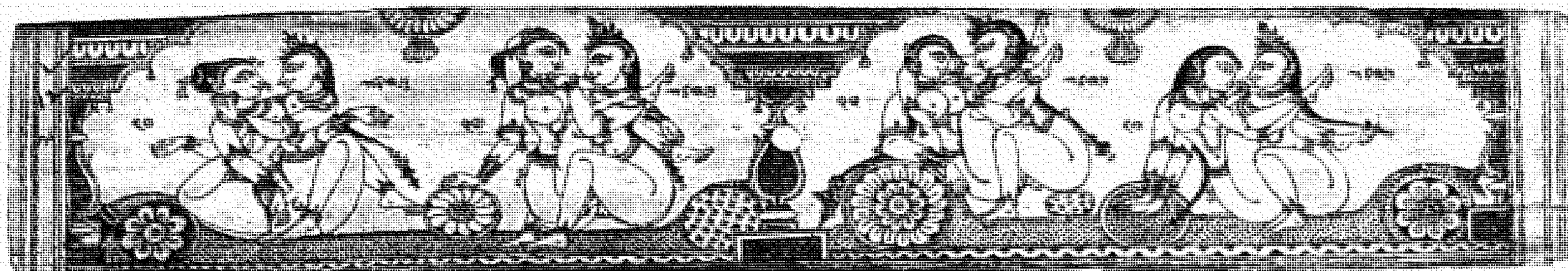
As ordained I have come
and now stand before you
why then this rolling on the floor and the reddened cheeks?
If you have love for me
take me in with both your hands
and award the punishment appropriate to my crime
strike me with your fingers and teeth
whereby you would be happy and forget your anger. (5)

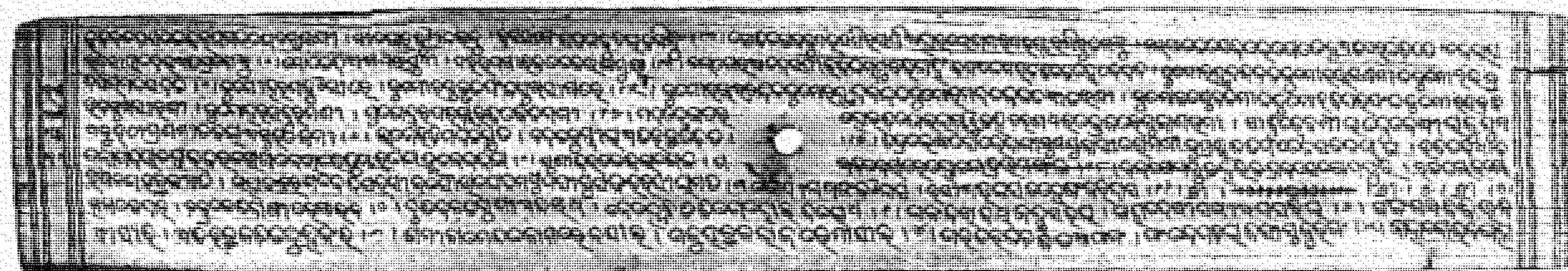
Flooding the golden banks
your dark coiffure cascades down
as the river Kalindi;
the mountains have blocked your moon
and the night reigns in your dark clothes.
I cannot see a thing
I can find direction only when
the moon of your face shines forth. (6)

From the golden mountain of your breasts
a stream of water flows down
to the confluence below the navel
and to gain your love I will float down
its pure waters, get submerged without fear
till I am lost in its deep whirlpool. (7)

Relying on the buoys of the breasts and the ample hips
I may cross the river of the love-god
and worship, anguished lover, Lord Śiva ,
so look up in compassion and encourage your slave. (8)

Your face vanquished the moon and she surrendered,
to reside in your nails; have compassion, O' doe-eyed
and speak sweet words that excel the koel's song. (9)





After demolishing Śiva 's penance
the love-god left for Hemagiri and handed over his *Veena*
to the God of creation who took ages to give you shape:
he put these golden vessels on your chest
the sweet music at your throat
and looking at your eyes he himself lost his mind. (10)

Quench my passion without chastisement
command in your koel's voice, my dear
my mind held still, I would strive
for the seven melodies of love
and get lost as if I never existed. (11)

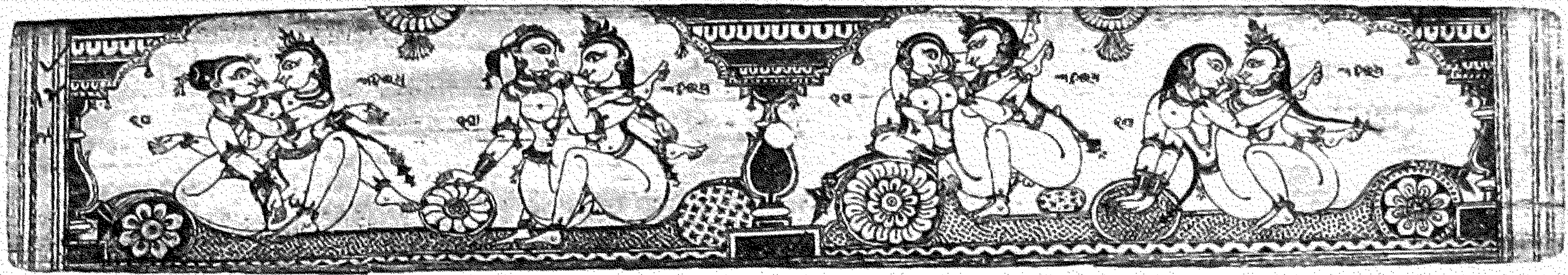
Do accept my entreaties dear, and speak softly
make me fearless against the terrible god of love
applying *makari* on your forehead and *alta* on your feet
I will purify these two hands;
by offering nectar from your lips
O' lotus-faced, buy me as your slave. (12)

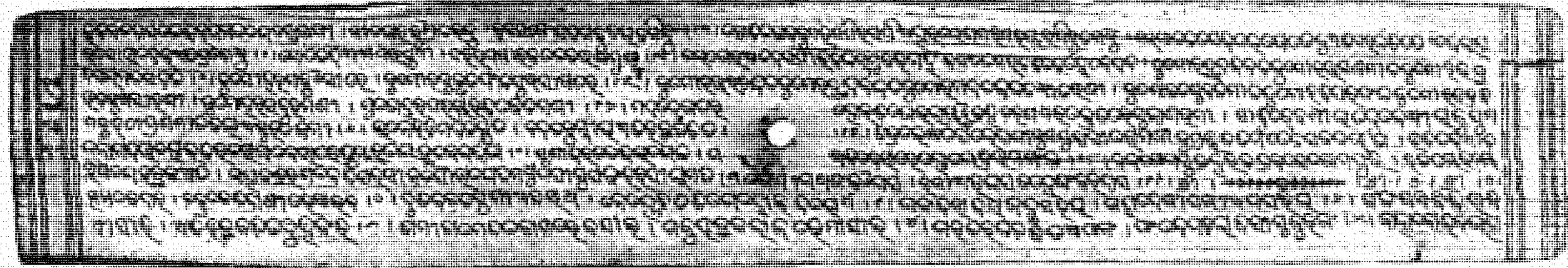
The God of love is terrible; he never keeps his place
and is no respecter of father, lords, friends or son;
Śiva had given him the right treatment
but you have given him a new lease of life,
O' doe-eyed, he was born from the ocean with the moon. (13)

The koel, the southern breeze and the cunning spring
these allies of the God of love serve you
and you grant them their wishes
grant me the nectar from your lips,
in compassion, for the good of others. (14)

Receiving your message, I never delayed
don't render it futile by your silent delays
you are the life of my heart
you are the crown on my head, all my decorations
and in the ocean of happiness you are
the result of my good deeds. (15)

You are the elegant sandal paste
the object of the heart's prayer





you are the boat in the sea of love's desire.
You are the garland of flower on my neck,
my elan, all my earthly pleasure, everything
do you not count me as the surrendered one? (16)

Trembling with desire, he spoke flattering words
and now held her feet;
it was then that her body trembled
and the god of love hit her in rage
as she got up and did obeisance to her lord,
hugging him tight, and impatient
she kissed his face passionately. (17)

Chitralekha then told Aniruddha:
You are well-versed in morals and it is only proper
you have her after making her your wife.
At this Aniruddha got up from her lap
and they were wedded in *gandharva* marriage. (18)

Krishna had come as Nandaraja's son
when the whole of Gopa lay asleep
and now his son like a thief had stolen love
when too, all were asleep.
And Sisushankar, as the bee at his lotus feet,
narrates this *Usābhilāsa* (19)

CHHANDA 8

RAGA-*KEDARA*

(To be sung in Chakrakeli Vani)

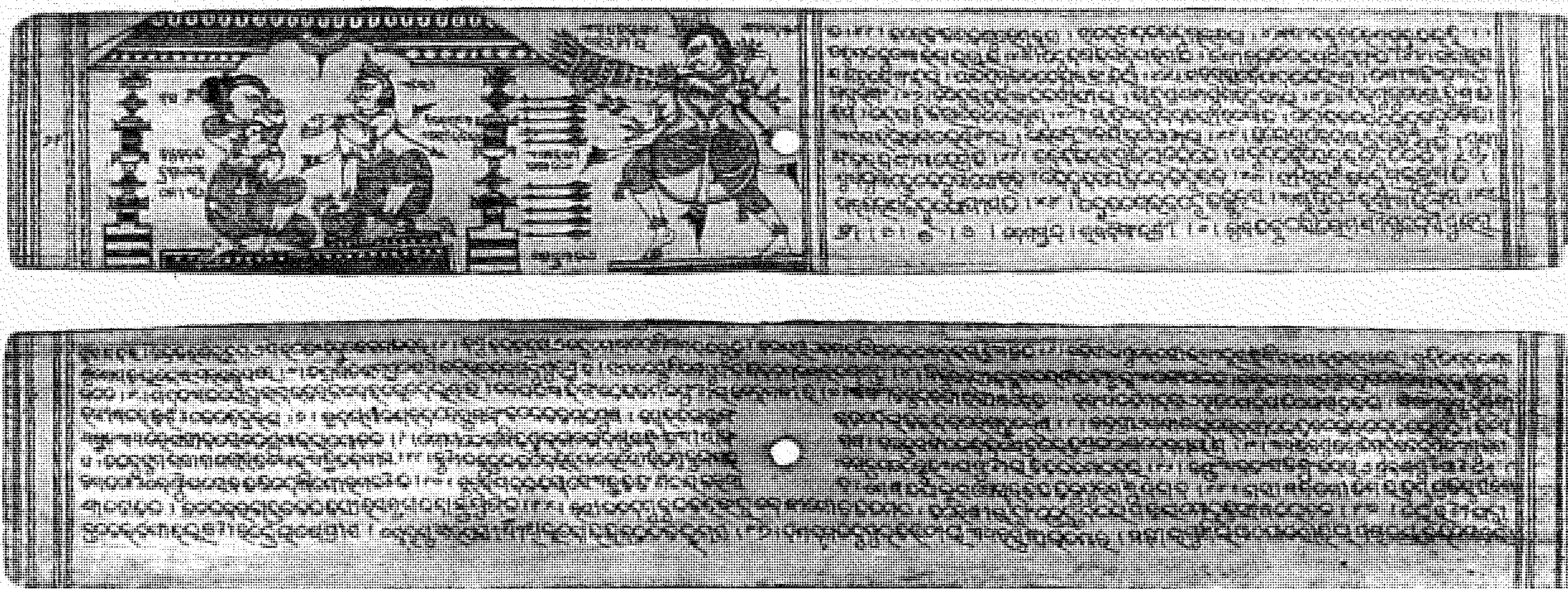
Hearing Chitralekha's advice
Aniruddha decided on conforming to rites
And when that was over
Chitralekha quietly withdrew. (1,2)

After the *gandharva* marriage
they were impatient for each other;
he put Usha in his lap
as impatience merged with shyness. (3,4)

She was an infant doe caught in the net
and startled, her glance was curved and flowing. (5)

She forgot what she wanted to say
and her body quivered in total shyness (6)

Her face rested on her husband's chest
as though the moon had entered the seas. (7)



Her body was all gooseflesh in ecstasy
and her lips, breasts and hips trembled. (8)

The body was weak, her words inchoate
and the clothes slipped from her waist. (9)

Her coyness was the ocean of love
wherein floated Aniruddha's mind. (10)

Terribly impatient he forgot his words
as he tried to flatter. (11)

Rescue me dear, he said,
let not death come to me,
when I have surrendered to you. (12)

The moon of your face
should save me from the darkness of desire. (13)

Please speak, O dear, soft and smiling
as nectar and deliver me from the heat of desire. (14)

And so saying he lost all his control
and picking her up in his two arms
pressed her firmly to his body. (15)

She opened her eyes
and lost her conscience in the sea of love. (16)

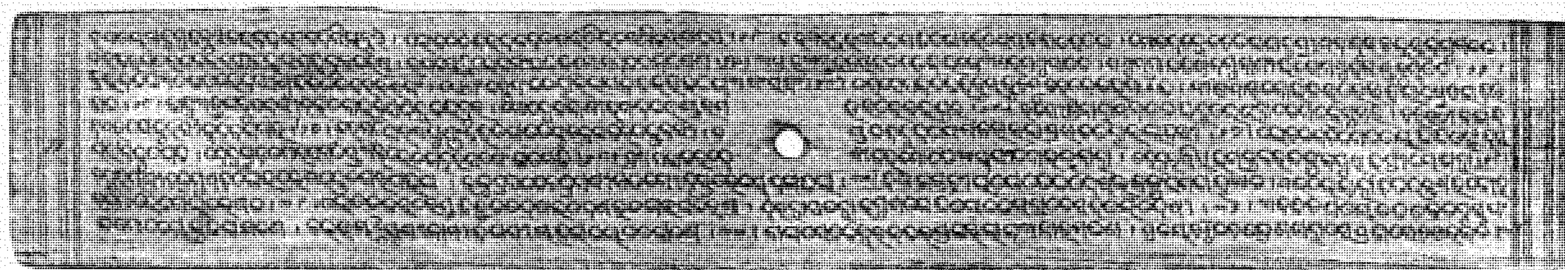
They embraced each other deep and hard
Sisushankar thinks the god of desire camouflaged. (17)

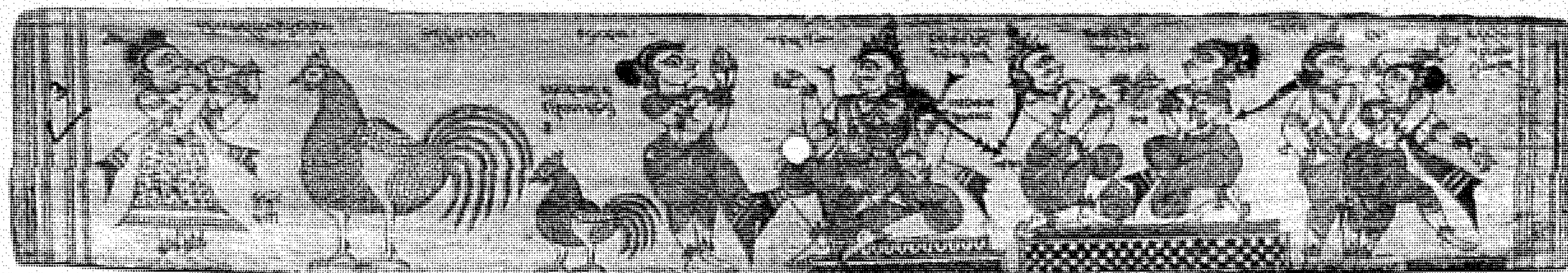
Her body in rapturous ecstacy
she dived into the waters of desire
and never left his arms (18)

She was the flash of lightning in dark clouds
a streak of gold on blue callipers. (19)

And she kissed him in forbidden spots
and his lust was only further roused. (20)

He was intoxicated by the wine of her lips
as lust played enemy to coyness. (21)





They had dalliance in various poses
and realised the art of love-making. (22)

Fully conversant in Kamashastra
they reaped all its benefits. (23)

She curved her eyes and
repeatedly heaved deep sigh. (24)

And now, arms loosened from embrace
the lips went dry and the coiffure was dishevelled. (25)

The collyrium in her eyes was wiped out
and sweat erased the sandalpaste mark from his forehead (26)

The nail marks showed as red
and drops of sweat shone on the breasts. (27)

It was as if a lion had torn asunder
and left behind the pearls of the tusk. (28)

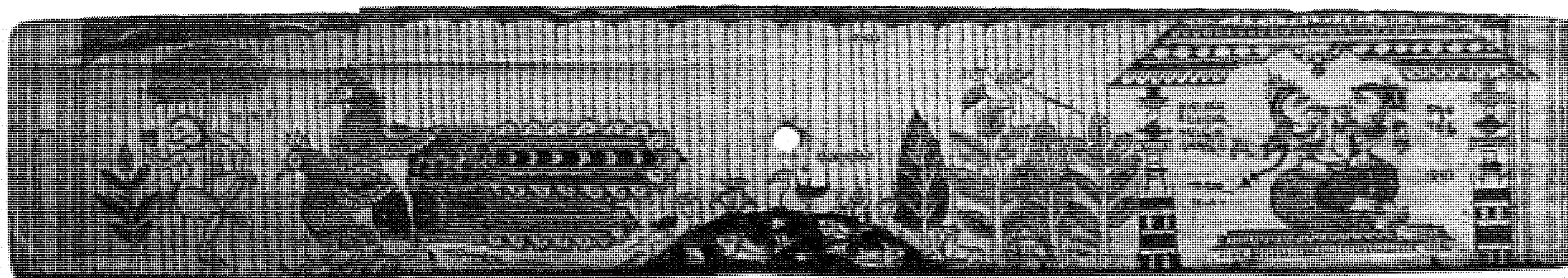
In the sweat-washed forehead there was
a surge of blue though Rahu moved away
leaving behind the moon. (29)

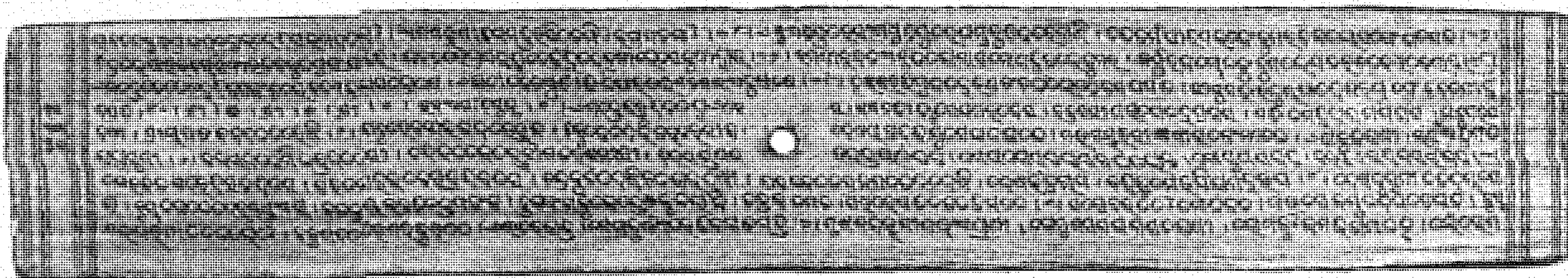
In fulfilling the wished-for deep lust
whoever can truly describe that *rasa*? (30,31)

As if coming out of a dream, a long while later
she remembered in utter shyness
what all she did to him
and what all he did to her which
she had silently accepted (32,33)

Fate has so crafted desire
that its end-result is often ecstasy.
On his lap Usha was
a sheaf of moonlight
with his own dress he
fanned her and wiped her face. (34-36)

He made up her face
re-arranged her coiffure and the pearl necklaces





and covered her waist in beautiful clothes
on her cheeks he painted *makari* and put *tatanka*
in her ears and pearls on her nose. (37-40)

Then he kissed the elegant face
and embraced the moon. (41)

Bracelets in her arms and pearls in the neck
sandal paste circle on forehead
and designs of leaves
on the breasts, where
he hid his own mind. (42-43)

There was no need for sandal paste
for her body itself excelled all aroma. (44)

He adorned her with many ornaments
and on her feet fixed the anklets of emerald. (45)

The sole of her feet which was red
was only accentuated by *alta*. (46)

Seeing her face reflected in her own nail
she smiled and did obeisance to him. (47)

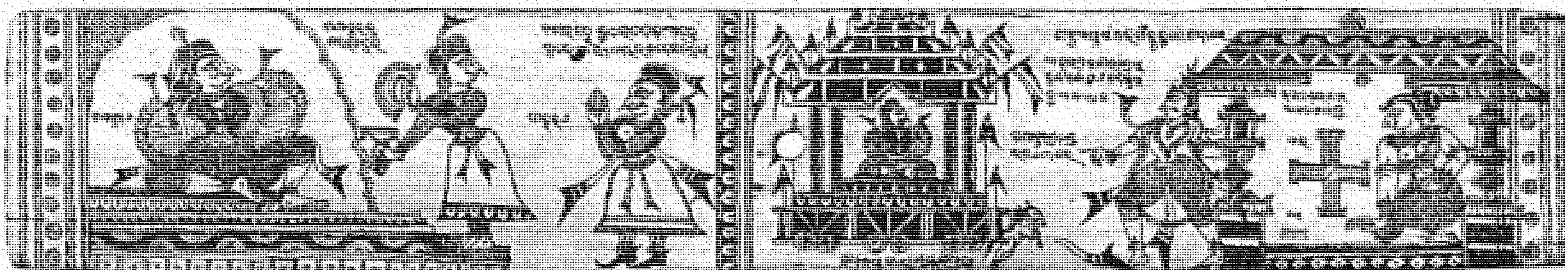
With her head bent, sweat-washed
she kissed it as in a mirror
and who can describe that in words. (48-49)

The god of desire returned
and submerged her whole body
and looking at her did he plan
to score another win over Śiva? (50-51)

No one can ever forget that beauty
that destroys conscience: let the ecstascies generated
remain embedded in the heart for ever. (52-53)

Sisushankar of little wisdom
surrenders himself
at the feet of the Lord of the *gopis*
and thus narrates this eighth *chhanda* of *Usābhilāsa*. (54-55)





CHHANDA 9

RAGA - *BANGALASHREE*

The crown jewel among the maidens and the well-dressed
youngman of valour were on the bejewelled bed
lit by the moon; their lotus-hands on chins. (1)

He glanced at her shy face of moon
and spoke in flattering words: (2)

In your chamber you were asleep on the ivory bed
and as the wages of my earlier *tapasya*
my glance fell on your beauty. (3)

Hearing the jingling of the anklets
that wakes up even the sleeping god of love
my life was indeed redeemed, oh lady
with the movement of an ecstatic swan. (4)

Your sidelong glance sprinkled petals of blue lilies
and the sweet smile on your lips red as *badhuka* flower
entered and built a nest in my heart. (5)

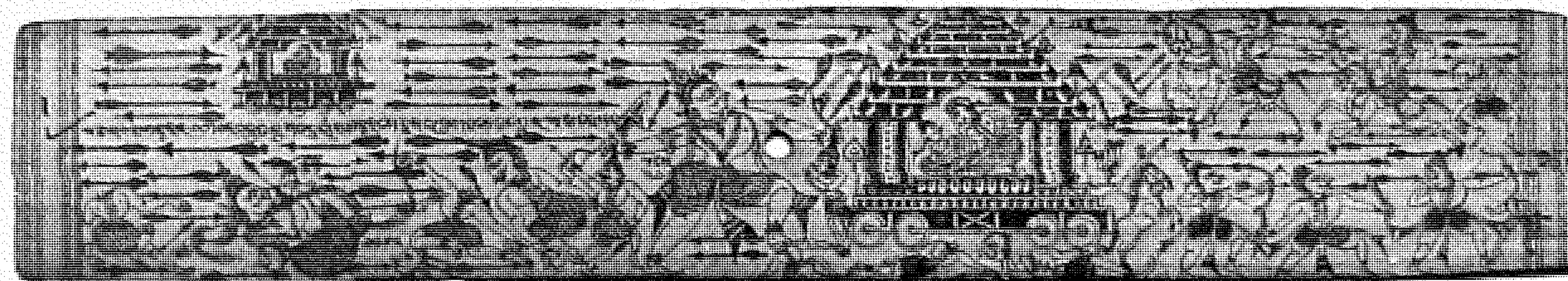
Indolent in lust, you put your hand
in my dishevelled hair
it was as if lotus blossomed on a golden hill
embraced by new rain-clouds. (6)

As your saree rustled in the gentle breeze,
oh, the beauty of the world,
it was the lightning flash on the crest of a crystal hill (7)

In the heart's *manasarovar* your face was a golden lotus
and the black bees and *kasturi* were the signs of Rahu. (8)

The *chakora* was confused between the moon and your face
giving up doubt it chose your face and was liberated. (9)





I knew the God of love had arrived with spring
with the arrow of your sidelong glance aimed from
the bow of the brow. (10)

The lips had the red of *badhuka* flower,
the teeth were pomegranate seeds
the face was the lotus and the dot
on the nose was a *til* flower. (11)

A pearl net shone on your dark and dense coiffure
the intoxicating *chhuriana* shone among
dark *tamala* leaves of spring. (12)

The earrings were like red *palasa* flowers
and the necklace, a wreath of chrysanthemum,
unhinged my mind. (13)

The hands and feet were new leaves
swaying in the scented breeze
the waistband a wreath of *nageswara* buds
and the anklets' sound as the humming of the bees. (14)

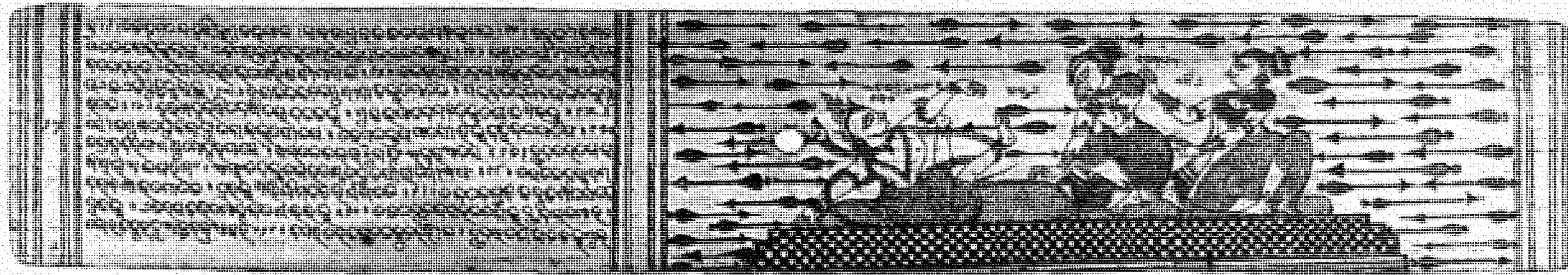
The nose-rings were *mallika* buds
and the voice that of the koel
the body soft as *sirisa* flower, yellow as *ketaki*
and the arms slender as lotus-stalk. (15)

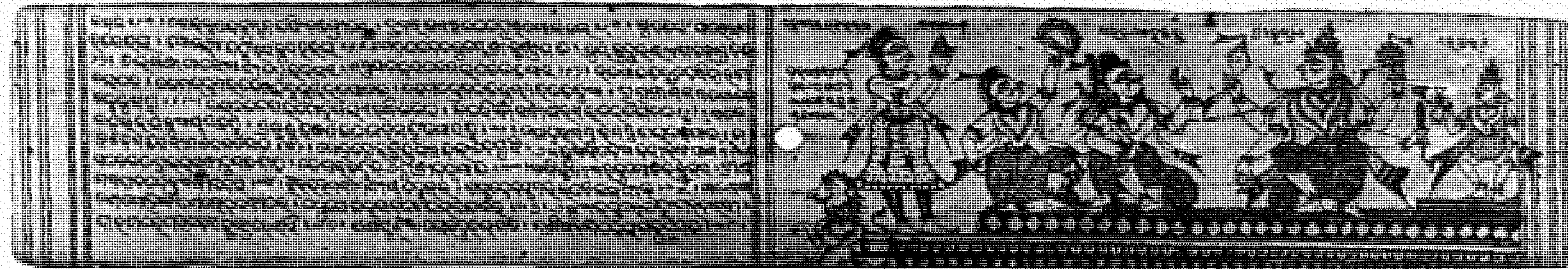
I was startled to see your nails
looking as buds of mango blossom
and slowly as you turned, your glance
that would render one unconscious, fell on me. (16)

You could not retrace it as it caused me deep pain
and you spared my life which you had nourished
with the nectar of your love. (17)

My body trembled, I had goose-flesh, my lips were dry
and it seemed I had forgotten
all the unheard-of lessons I had ever learnt. (18)

Helpless, as I wondered, by accident a thought dawned
on my mind and leaving the bed I got up
O' most compassionate lady. (19)





Hands trembling, with unsteady gait as I fell unconscious
at your feet, you took me in your arms. (20)

Driving away embarassment, you made me seat on the bed
I looked at your face and realised myself,
the son of the God of love. (21)

Forsaking nectar that abolishes death
I settled for the honey from your lips
and as I kissed your sweet cheeks I knew
the love of the bee for the flower. (22)

I used to make fun nestling in the lap
of Krishna, the lord of the three worlds
and that gave me the good fortune
of gaining the company of your body. (23)

Driven by desire I squeezed and pressed
the pitchers of your breasts,
They grew pink and I kept squeezing almost for an eternity
determined that it should hurt. (24)

Where is it, I must see it
with this thought I disrobed you;
intoxicated, I looted the treasure-house
of the God of love. (25)

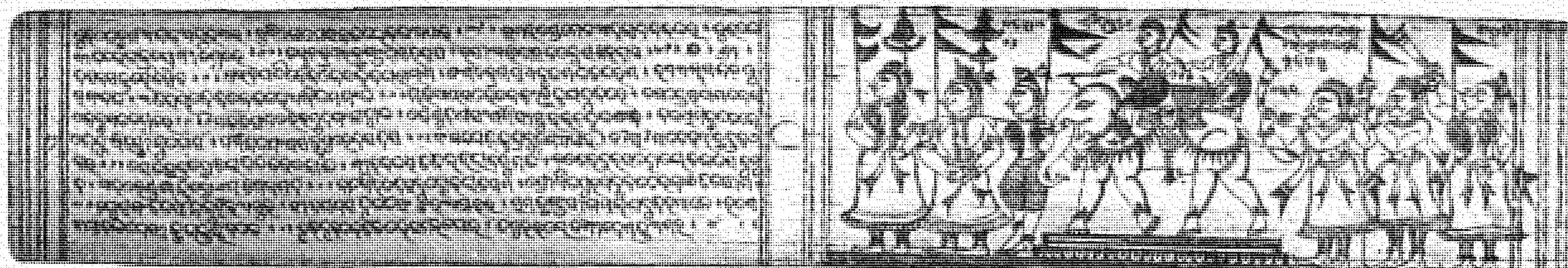
You recalled all the scriptures of the God of love
as you fulfilled me and yourself
in the sixty-four arts of love. (26)

When at its end I tried to dress you up again
cruel destiny brought in the dawn
and the night was at an end. (27)

My eyes, my words and my mind
they all deserted me
and remained with you, their desired object. (28)

Seeing my anguish, you consoled me
and I remembered and gloated over them as *mantra*. (29)

As I tried vainly to paint your portrait
I only sweated; for god had created you
only in your own image and I could
hardly capture anything on the canvas. (30,31)



Tears rolling down my eyes I entreated you
to show me your smiling face mercifully, once again, (32)

At these words of flattery from the lover
she looked from the corner of her eyes
and it was the fulfilment of the earth's penance. (33)

In the night of *nayika's* love
in the darkness of her embarassment
the lover's words of flattery is like the moon-rise. (34)

When darkness is dispelled
the pathway is visible and the lovers move on
to the forbidden land as the doors of desire open up. (35)

And so the conches sounded, the cocks crowed
the morning rites over
the lover sat on the bed with the beloved. (36)

She called for Chitralekha, her *sakhi*
praised her faithfulness and entrusted to her
the guarding of the entrance to her chamber. (37)

For the prince they cooked food delicious as nectar
and there was also betelnut with camphor and *kumkum*. (38)

And so they spent the days in fun and frolic
immersed in love they hardly had a wink of sleep. (39)

The father of Śiva's enemy
the spouse of the swift doe-eyed Kamala
Sisushankar seeks refuge at your feet
do redeem, O' lord, my misfortune. (40)

CHHANDA 10

RAGA - *ASADHASHUKLA*

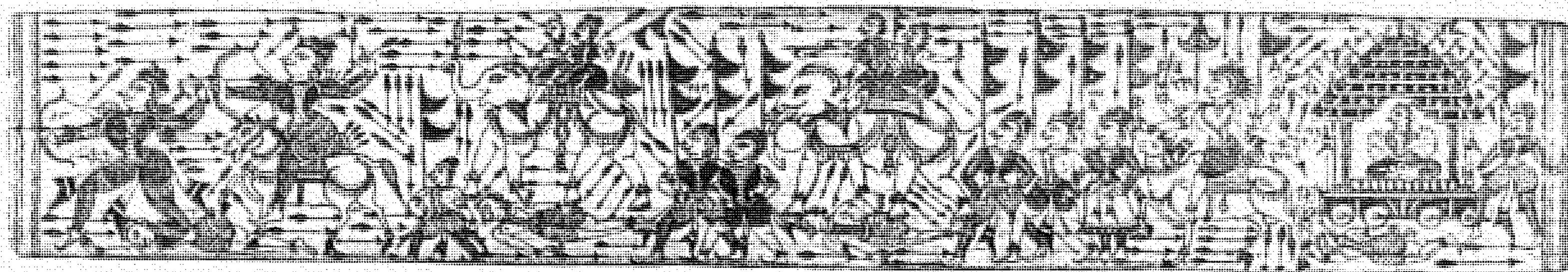
And so the days rolled on;
clouds moved in, darkening the sky;
the sun, the moon and the stars were hidden
the forest fires extinguished
and the lover kept gazing at the beloved's lotus eyes. (1)

Placing her on his lap, his hands on her shoulders
he pointed to the lightning in the clouds
the dance of the intoxicated peacocks
and the song of the early rain birds. (2)

It was time for lovers to return home from distant lands
like a river rushing unto the sea;
the sparrows forgot their long anguish
and the clouds brought happiness to all
but how wistful one was if left alone! (3)

Torrential showers erased all directions
days and nights looked alike
the moon-bird *chakora* pined for the moon
as the Yadavas pine for me; and look,
the rainbow, is like my grandfather Krishna, (4)

See the *kadamba* in blossom
it has the colour of your cheeks after the kiss;
concealing the depths of water the lotus grows
like a young woman of respectable parentage
the humid breeze blows gently through forests of *ketakai*. (5)





Unaware of the sweet aroma of your face
the bees are engaged in love-play with
the flowers, *mallika*, *malati* and others;
the frogs' croaking has silenced the koel. (6)

The dark *Tamala* forest is near the tank
the flowering creepers roll on the ground
and are again lifted up by the swirling wind
the white flowers shine as swans on the dark rain clouds. (7)

With pleasant words thus exchanged
they spent the days and nights of the rains
then it was autumn and the water in the river grew clear
like a beloved's heart that has got over anger
the sun and moon once again visible
looked like wisemen after a tragedy. (8)

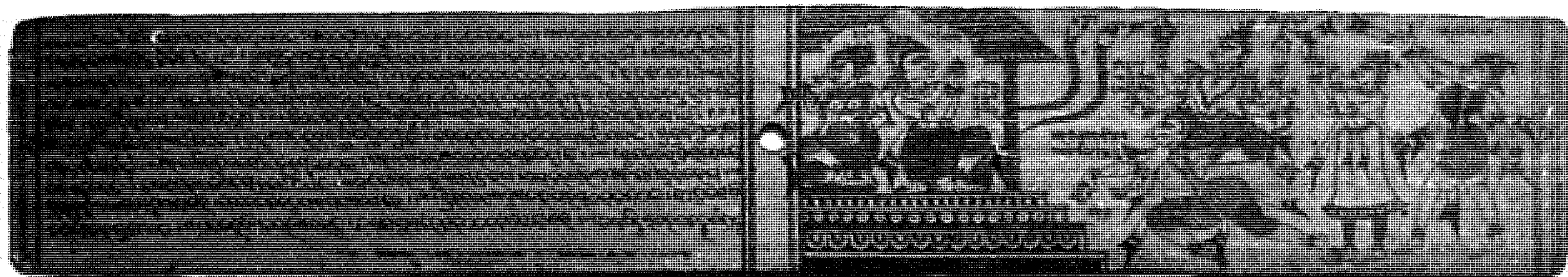
Seeing the moon's beauty Aniruddha
and his beloved, annointed with sandal paste,
left the palace and went over to the pleasure pool. (9)

Look, dear, he told her, how the bees leave the lotus
and come over to your face
and the lotus closed up in shame. (10)

The banks of the rivers are beautiful
and my mind is stolen by your thighs;
the swan loses its way at the jingling of your anklets
and the *chakora* now loves the moon
deprived of the sight of your face. (11)

The lotus and the lily shine; the *sephali* is a
mix of coral and pearl
and looks like love in a pure heart,
the flowering creepers have the grace
of your *alta*-smeared feet. (12)

The *Kunda*, the chrysanthemum and *mallika*
shine like the moon
and the moon unable to rival your face
headed for non-existence in the *amabasya* nights. (13)



The days look pale, the owl vainly looks for the moon;
with trembling body and dried-up lips
they returned back to the palace and spent the night. (14)

As they sat down to a game of dice
and enjoyed its fun and kissed each other,
a messenger, carried the word to the king. (15)

The peacock flag fell off his chariot as the messenger
conveyed the presence of a lover in the palace of the princes
and the demon king rushed out in fearsome anger. (16)

And there he saw that divine form
yellow costume, garland of forest flowers round the neck
the peacock head-dress; he looked as Krishna himself
with eyes bright as lotus. (17)

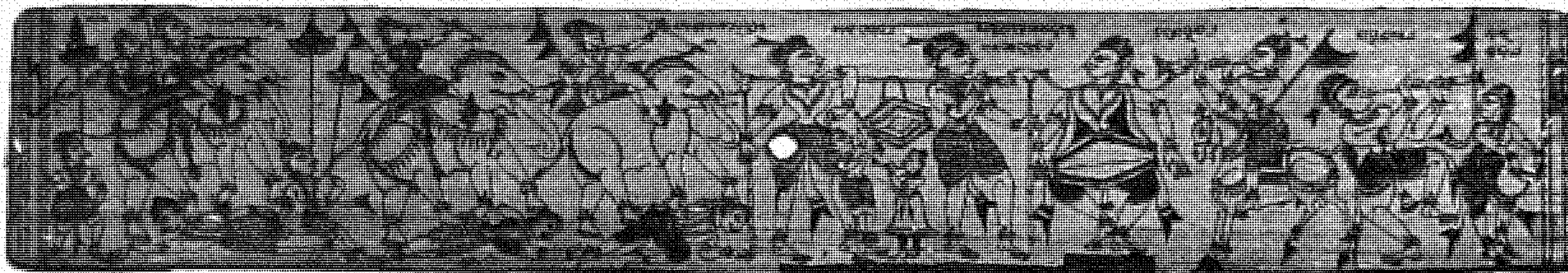
The arms slender like lotus-stalk
he held dice sticks in his hand
the king roared as an intoxicated elephant
consoling the frightened Usha, Aniruddha
picked up his mightly ammunitions. (18)

He fought as a powerful lion
and annihilated most of the demon's army
and hit by his arms, king Banasura
fainted in his chariot. (19)

The minister whispered in the King's ear:
lord, this is no ordinary man
for he is the grandson of Krishna
and so better engage him in an illusory war. (20)

Hearing this, the king got into an illusory chariot
and vanished into the sky
and from there he sent out arrows
and imprisoned Aniruddha in a serpent net;
at this Usha fainted and fell to the ground. (21)

Her friend sprinkled water on her face;
and as she regained her senses
she wept reminiscing on her lover's gifts
Sisushankar thus narrates *Usābhilāsa*
and with this ends the tenth *chhanda*. (22)



CHHANDA 11

RAGA - *BARADI*

Her beautiful face washed with collyrium-tinged tears
the red-lotus hands on the cheeks
Usha wept bitterly, blaming cruel destiny. (1,2)

Dear lord where have you gone
I cannot stand the sight of your closed eyes. (3)

The softest beds hurt your body
and now you lie on the ground in dust. (4)

My embrace leaves the mark of bracelets
on your delicate body and now how do you stand
the serpent-net? (5)

The time I take to complete my morning rituals
leaves you impatient pining for love. (6)

In times of happiness you paint my portrait
and now you have forgotten all that, my love. (7)

You pity the love-lorn *chakori* of the night
don't you then have any kindness for me? (8)

Don't you recall how once you dreamt
of losing me and woke up weeping. (9)

And as you smiled, not revealing the reason
I teased you, asking if you had
dreamt of the women of Dwaraka. (10)

And how could you forget, my lord,
what you told me holding up my chin. (11)

Once in fun, when I hid myself in the bowers
you were almost mad, enquiring of each creeper,
each tree if it had seen me. (12,13)

You mistook the koel's song for my voice
embraced the flowering creepers
wept to see the frolicking pairs of deer
and have you forgotten
what all you told me when, finally,
I came and fell at your feet? (14-16)

You look upon sleep with disaffection
and keep away from it, afraid of separation. (17)

When the red *alta* touched your chest
you said that your body had
borrowed my beauty;
and as I smeared sandal paste
on your breast you made me taste the wine of love
and like a thief stole all my patience. (18,19)

Did you love so much only because
you were to leave me?
and drown my single-minded devotion
in the waters of illusion? (20)



When sweat drops fell on your body as I engaged
in love-making in the reverse
you said that sprinkling water from my pitcher
I had only quenched the fire lit by love. (21-23)

And now, in my youth's world, all the arts of *rasa*
and all the fears of love have ended. (24)

Krishna's grandson and the love god's son
no young damsel unavailable to you was. (25)

For coming in contact with this inauspicious woman
you are destroyed like the bee
entering the *ketaki* flower. (26)

How would the people of Dwaraka survive
the grief of your separation
as they witness the symptoms of destruction?
and how would your mother
save her heart, O' lord of my life? (27,28)

So saying she fainted and her friend
sprinkled water on her face
and revived and consoled her:
no tragedy can befall one who has tasted
the nectar from your lips
your lord has only fainted
and would wake up soon and
Lord Krishna himself would come here. (29-32)

If only someone informed Krishna
and he came and killed
my degenerate father and
revived my lord, she said, (33,34)

Thus she pined in anguish,
repeatedly fainted
woke up again and wept bitterly. (35,36)

Meanwhile the sage Narada went to Mathura
and informed Krishna how his grandson
fell in love with the demon-king Bana's daughter
and how Bana had caught him in the snares of the serpent
and it was his duty to release him. (37,38)

Krishna assembled his mighty force
Ugrasen and the Yadus and soon reached Sonitapura. (39,40)

So says Shankaradasa, the servant's servant of Krishna
the wielder of conch and *chakra*, this *Ushābhilāsa* (41)



CHHANDA 12

RAGA - *BASANTA BHAIRAV*

Lord Narayan, mounted on Garuda
the conch, the *chakra*, the mace, the bow
and the lotus on his hand; the chariots, horses
elephants and all the heroic yadus:
He was out to bless this universe
and who can think of a simile for the sight. (1)

Veena, bheri, mrudangam, tamaka
all the instruments
announcing the war sounded; it was
like the ocean's mighty roar
when it is churned;
Krishna's conch *Panchajanya's* sound
filled all the ten directions;
the priests chanted invocations
and the scribes sang panegyrics. (2)

The sun seemed to be hidden
behind the chariot's white flag
and the sea surged over the land
the *chakora* was happy and the lilies blossomed;
in the lotus forest
of Sonitapura veritably the moon had arisen. (3)

The demon king fought with all his forces
and the forces of Lord Śiva ;
with Krishna by their side
the heroic yadus were veritably
symbols of death,
the gods trembled in fear in the sky
to see the mighty war of Hari and Hara
as the three worlds trembled. (4)

Brahma, descended to pacify Śiva
urging that Bana cannot fight Vishnu;
Bhavani protected his slaughter by *chakra*
and only his arms were cut off.
Thus the Lord of the yadus conquered his capital
and gave back his life to Bana. (5)

He entered the palace and went near Aniruddha
the snakes fled away in fear of Garuda;
Krishna took the bride and groom
on his lap and returned back to the sound of conches
and the house of the enemy was struck with terror. (6)

Like blue clouds on a golden hill
like lightning in the rainbow
Aniruddha and Usha were on his lap;
the Lord was on Garuda
no simile can do justice to that sight
Krishna moving in the sky
and the forces on the ground. (7)

White flags in-laid with jewels
horses, elephants, the soldiers
almost an ocean moving and the Garuda
with its rider as the hill
churning that ocean which once brought up
goddess Lakshmi and all the gods. (8)

All that had come out of the ocean:
the elephant *Airavata*, the horse *Uchaisrava*
the nectar, the curved look
all those were alive again in Usha
as the gods forgot their disputes
and enjoyed the sight. (9)

As they moved, the swirling dust from their feet
covered the sun and darkness descended
Usha's face was the moon that lighted up
the path to Dwaravati where young damsels
rushed forward, all eager to see her. (10)

Someone wearing a garland lost it on the way
someone had her dress falling off the body
someone left the *Veena* she was playing
and instead caressed her own breast
thinking it was the *Veena's tumbi;*
the housewives peeped through window-lattices
and praised the god that had made her. (11)

On the royal way the women stood
their extended arms were arches of leaves
their large breasts the auspicious pitchers
as they scattered the flowers of their smile;
their thighs were the banana trees
and their eyes those of fishes. (12)

Sandal paste, *durba*, unbroken rice, curd
and ghee were scattered on them by the priests
as the women did the *ulu-ulu* sound
Rukmini, Satyabhama and others kissed and welcomed
the daughter-in-law with lighted lamps. (13)

Consulting the auspicious moment
they performed the appropriate marriage rites;
such was the divine play of the Lord
to entertain the human beings;
who indeed can describe in words His attributes
that are unknown even to Brahma? (14)

The Lord's *leelas* as expressed through music
and literature is like the ocean
one only realises to the extent one can fathom
and yet they know and say it is fathomless;
through *shastras* one only realises a bit of it. (15)

Do relish the *rasa,* dear wise *rasikas*
in the reading of *Usābhilāsa*;
the Lord of the blue mountain, Kamala's consort
let my mind ever meditate on his lotus feet
and Sisushankar, bereft of all wisdom,
thus completes *Ushābhilāsa* in twelve *chhandas*. (16)

NOTES ON THE TEXT

CHHANDA ONE

1. *Blue Mountain*—Lord Jagannatha of Puri is referred to as the Lord of the Blue Mountain. Tradition has it that Jagannatha who is the embodiment of Vishnu and also Krishna lived in a blue hillock on the shores of the sea. Today the Jagannatha temple is also referred to as Blue Mountain.
2. *Kamadhenu*- The wish-fulfilling cow.

CHHANDA THREE

1. *Mallika, Patali, Ashoka, Ketaki, Chhuriana* are different flowers which blossom in spring with their varying colours and heady aroma.

CHHANDA SEVEN

1. *Makari*- A pattern of design drawn on the female body with *kumkum*.
2. *Gandharva*- A recognised form of marriage without the traditional social and ritual celebrations.

CHHANDA EIGHT

1 *Tatanka*- A heavy pair of ear-rings which Oriya women used in ancient times.

CHHANDA NINE

1. *Badhuka, Til, Palasa, Nageswara, Sirisa* are various local flowers associated with the season of spring.

CHHANDA TEN

1. *Tamala* - A forest tree associated with the theme of Radha-Krishna love.
2. *Kadamba, Kunda, Sephali*-Varieties of local flowers; the first one is associated with the rainy season.

CHHANDA TWELVE

1. *Veena, Mrudangam, Bheri, Tamaka* - These are various musical instruments.
2. *Durba* - Blades of grass used for holy ceremonial occasions.